

95-04-02Mark

We have decided to slow our pace a bit and make sure that we ourselves understand what Jesus is teaching in this parable, so that as we encounter the others that he teaches, we will understand them as well. And we've seen in this picture that Jesus paints of the different types of soil and what happens to the seed when it hits that soil, that Jesus is teaching us about the process of faith. Our response, our reaction, what we do with that seed, which is the Word of God.

Jesus explains this parable and he talks about what those soils represent and we have seen in detail what the hard-packed soil means. This is in that picture that we have used for illustration purposes, that at the point of hearing the Word, we make a decision. What will we do about the fact that this Word is being presented, that it's being taught? Are we going to expose ourselves to it? Are we going to be in the place where the seed is scattered and let that seed sink into us or not? If we make a negative decision at that point, if we reject the hearing of the Word of God, we won't assemble ourselves together under the sound of the Word of God.

We won't turn on our radio when there's a good Bible teacher. We won't read good books where godly men explain the truth of Scripture. We just don't assign it a high priority in our lives.

We say, well, Bible reading, knowledge of the truth, that's kind of one of dozens of things that a good believer ought to do, but it doesn't really have a great priority in my life. And right there, we're hard-packed soil. And the seed can't do its work because it never sinks into the soil and gets nurtured where it can germinate, sink in roots, produce a stalk and produce fruit.

So that's the first decision that we have to make. How important is the Word of God to me? Can we ask ourselves that question? What priority does it hold in my life? Do I respect it, but I don't pursue it? Do I occasionally try to focus on it? Or is it a priority? Do I realize that this is the beginning point from which all of the proportion of my production will come? That without hearing the Word, I can't produce a crop that pleases our Lord in heaven. It's the beginning point.

If we don't expose ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God, if we're not there when the seed is scattered, if we don't take it in, it is impossible to produce that crop. It's a necessary first step. We saw then the second type of soil, the stony soil, where the Word is received with joy.

Oh, this is wonderful. This is great. I enjoyed the sermon so much.

I enjoyed that radio broadcast so much. I read the best book the other day. There was the nicest lesson this morning in Our Daily Bread.

It was just wonderful. I appreciated it. I agreed with everything it said.

It made sense to me. It shined a new light on Scripture for me. But day after tomorrow, I've kind of forgotten.

I haven't let it sink in deeply. It sunk into the surface, and I accepted it with joy, but I didn't really incorporate it into my thinking. I didn't make it the object of my meditation.

I didn't think... Now, what was it that I read that was so good in that book last week or last month? What was that study we had in Ladies' Auxiliary? Or what was that great point that the chaplain made in the chapel service a month ago or two months ago? What was that wonderful truth that struck me in Sunday School last week or the week before? What was that thing that suddenly came clear for me? Do we bring it back? Do we nurture it? Do we try to sustain its life and the vision that it gives us of God in our soul? Or do we sort of take it for granted? I said, well, if I lose that one, there'll be another one next week. And I'm always in church. I'm always hearing good things.

So one good thing, more or less, doesn't really matter. We don't reject it. We assemble.

We hear it. We just don't nurture it. We don't treasure it.

We don't embrace it and take it deep inside ourselves where it can make a difference. That's that second type of soil, and that's our second decision point. It is not enough to say, I have heard, I have listened, I have read.

That's the necessary first step, but that's not enough. That second step is necessary. What will I now do with that seed that has dropped beneath the surface of the soil? Am I going to embrace it, enfold it, meditate on it, make it the object of my thinking? Am I going to ask myself Francis Schaeffer's great question, how should I then live if this is true? What difference should this make in my life if this is true? Can I sustain the value of that truth in my life for more than a day or two days or three days? Is it going to make a permanent difference in me? That's that second decision point.

If we fail at that point, we're the stony soil. It has sunk in. We're not a rejecter of the truth.

We're just not an embracer of the truth. And we will find that out when pressure comes. Jesus said when the sun rose and that seed had only the shallowest of root systems, the pressure hit and the very light that should cause growth, the very light that should sponsor photosynthesis in those leaves, should produce nourishment and make the plant ready to produce fruit.

Instead, that sun withers and kills the very thing that it ought to be sustaining and causing to grow because the roots aren't there. And the Word of God won't benefit us and we will not be beneficial in God's plan if we have a shallow approach to the Word of God, if we do it lip service, if we show up when the doors are open but we're just there going through the motions. It's a shallow, a hollow, superficial experience.

We have to decide. We have to make it our priority. It's a conscious decision.

It takes effort in some cases. What was the sermon about last week? My goodness, last week we missed Sunday night. What was the Sunday night lesson about two weeks ago? What book were we in? What truth did we uncover? What difference should that make in my life? That's that second decision point.

Jesus then talked about a third type of soil where the seed is sown, it sinks in, and it goes ahead and gets a pretty good root system going, but it's not alone. It's not taking first place. It's there and it's believed and the Word is made the object of faith, but we also take in other things.

We take in thistle seeds and thorn seeds, briar seeds, and we give them the same nurturing and the same encouragement and the same level of meditation that we give the seed of the Word. And so along with the truth of the Word of God, we count the things we studied in Colossians like human tradition, the opinions of people, the necessity to keep up a good appearance. Things that are not a part of the plan of God are given equal weight and equal nourishment, equal time in our soul and in our thought process, and what happens? The Word of God develops roots and it sprouts and grows, but other things also grow up with it.

And it chokes the Word and makes it unproductive. And at that third decision point, we face the ultimate decision that determines whether we are zero production, 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold. That decision is, now that I have heard the Word, I have meditated on it, I know how I should live in the light of it, I recognize the areas where I need to change and I need to step out in faith, I need to grow, I need to relax perhaps, I need to develop more patience, I need to develop more perseverance, I need to develop in other categories of the fruit of the Spirit, God is going to give us the opportunity, the sun is going to rise and the pressure is going to be there, and we have to make that third and critical decision, am I now going to actually act on what I believe to be true? What the Word of God tells me and I know in my heart is true.

The truth that the Holy Spirit has confirmed in my thinking. There is no doubt in my mind that this is right, but am I going to suddenly opt for another alternative? Well, it would seem that based on what I have learned that I ought to go in this direction, but my goodness, we have never done that, we have always done it this way, and that has been safe, I have never gotten in big trouble doing it this way, it is comfortable, nobody will raise an eyebrow if I do it the way I have always done it, and we miss that great third opportunity for decision, that great opportunity to produce, and this is what distinguishes the non-productive from the 30-fold and the 60-fold and the 90-fold. What is the pattern of decisions in those three critical areas? So we have seen that, we have seen that this is Jesus teaching in this parable, and this is why He says if you understand this parable, you are set to understand the other parables, because now you know why I am teaching, now you know why I am presenting you this truth, and you know exactly what you ought to be doing with it.

If we don't understand this parable, none of the others are going to do us any good, because we don't understand the role of the Word of God in our lives and in our hearts, we don't understand

the way God measures our production, that it is based on what comes out of that thoughts and intents area of our soul. Our thoughts and intents cannot be changed by good intentions, our thoughts and intents cannot be changed by modifying our outward habits, the thoughts and intents of our heart can't be changed by pressure from other people. The thoughts and intents of the heart can only be changed by the Word of God.

It's God's Word and God's Spirit that are alive and powerful. It's God's Word and God's Spirit that transform us deep at the center of our being. We have to let that seed sink in and we have to let the Holy Spirit do His work before anything that we do is going to have genuine value.

We talked a little bit last Sunday about what happens if we skip the second step. We hear the Word and we receive it and then we immediately try to jump and make production based on it. We say, well, the Word of God says, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, so by golly, I'm going to be there every time the doors are open.

And we do that because we see that as a behavior that is a characteristic of a believer that pleases the Lord. But we're there because we know that if we're not there, someone's going to ask questions, eyebrows will be raised, someone may say something bad about us, our reputation may slip a little bit as a saint, and so we're motivated by the same thing that would motivate an unbeliever to not miss a club meeting or an organization meeting or anything else that they might be expected to do. And any unbeliever can act on the basis of other people's expectations.

Only a believer can act out of love for the Lord and a desire to please Him. And that takes place when the Word of God tells us what God expects. So this is what Jesus is pointing out.

What we want to look at this morning is the nature of that production. We've seen the nature of the process. We've seen the process of faith.

It requires, it's not an option, it requires absorbing the seed. It requires being there when the seed is scattered. There is no substitute for the seed of God's Word.

You have to be there when it's taught. You have to turn on your radio or read a book or play a tape or listen to someone who is teaching. Open the Word of God and read it.

Whatever it takes to be exposed to the truth, that's the scattering of the seed. It's a necessary, vital first step. The necessary, vital second step is to do more than a superficial job of examining the truth.

We need to do what James says. Look intently into the perfect law of liberty. Look at our reflection.

How do we stack up compared to what God's Word says? Not compared to what people expect. Not compared to tradition. Not compared to what we've done for the last 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 or

50 or 60 or 70 years.

What does the Word of God say? Wasn't this the great mistake that the Jews made in Jesus' day? They'd had the law for 1,300 or 1,400 years. They'd had the prophets for 600 or 700 or 800 years. They'd had the Psalms of David and the Proverbs of Solomon for 1,000 years.

And by the time of Jesus Christ, what had happened? There had been such an incrustation of human interpretation and human viewpoint about what the Word of God meant and what it said and what righteousness was that it no longer reflected the truth. Sacrifices no longer reflected joy and thanksgiving and worship in the heart of the sacrificer. It was now a ritual that kept one in good standing in the community.

We have had the New Testament for 2,000 years, almost twice as long as the Jews had the Old Testament. And let us not fool ourselves. We have done this.

We have put wrapping paper over the truth of the Word of God. And then we've stuck it in a box. And then we put it in a shipping crate.

And then we bronzed it and gilded it and put a plaque in front of it and said, this is the will of God for believers. And it's not right. It's not true.

It is not true that God judges us by what we do. It's not true that God will reward us for showing up at church every Sunday. It is not true that God will reward us for evangelism.

It is not true that God will reward us for putting money in the plate. Are those things good? Are they expressions of something righteous? Can they be something for which we are approved by God? Yes. But in isolation, in and of themselves, they don't mean a thing.

Only if they stem from something on the inside, only if they stem from the thoughts and intents of the heart that have been transformed by God's Word, do they count, do they matter, do they mean something to God. And what we have done, we've been so anxious to get the cart full of apples that we have completely ignored the horse. We have been so anxious to demonstrate those fruits that God wants us to demonstrate that we have, in many cases, lost the means.

How do those things come? What is the process by which they're developed in our lives? We look at one another and we judge one another by, were they there? Were they on time? How did they dress? How did they speak? What did they say? We judge everything by superfluities and externals. How is that different from the Pharisees? How is that different from the legalism of Jesus' day? A superficial application of the behavior standards in the law. When someone didn't measure up to the behaviors of the law, they were condemned.

Nobody looked in the heart. Nobody took time to examine themselves and say, do I love the Lord my God with all my heart? What did the Shema, what did the great glory passage that they began

each service say? Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord. It doesn't say you shall serve the Lord your God.

It doesn't say you shall bring your tithes into the storehouse. It doesn't say you shall evangelize the Gentiles. It doesn't say you shall glean the corners of your fields and hand it out to the poor.

What does it say? You shall love. You shall love. The things that you do will be a result and a reflection of love.

I could write a great book on being a husband or being a son or being a good friend, and I could get it published and have it down here on the racks in the bookstore, and people would buy it and read it and think it was great. And I could say, here are my guaranteed seven steps for being a good son. Be sure you send your parents birthday cards on their birthday.

Be sure you remember their anniversary and send flowers. Be sure you visit them at least once every two months. If they live close, visit them once a month.

To be a good son, be sure that you're there in a time of need. Be sure that if they get hospitalized, you're on the phone and you're on the airplane and you're there and you stay with them until they're well. I could make these steps.

Now, would a good son do these things? Of course. Does doing these things make you a good son? Not necessarily. It works great when you go one direction.

It doesn't compute backwards. You can't say anyone that does those things is a good son. Somebody may have read the will and say, I want to stay in good graces so that I get the money when my paternal ancestor kicks the bucket.

And there's some other motivation for sending the cards and the gifts and visiting and so forth. If I was the parent, would I be happy? Well, it doesn't matter to me why they're visiting, why they're sending the cards, why I'm getting the flowers. I'm just glad for the visits and the flowers.

And even though they're doing it out of greed and out of trying to beat their brothers and sisters out of the inheritance and so forth, that doesn't matter to me. I'm just glad they're doing the works. We wouldn't accept that, would we? Would that satisfy us and encourage us and make us happy with our children if they did these things out of a faulty motivation like that? Well, what makes us think that our Heavenly Father is any more satisfied when we do things out of faulty motivation, when we do things because people are watching, when we do things because that's the tradition, that's what's expected, that's how we should look, that's how we should act? God isn't any more pleased with us acting out of selfish, impure motivations than we would be with somebody doing that to us.

So, what's the answer? It's pretty easy to identify the problem, but what's the answer? Jesus is giving it to us in this parable. If you want to have genuine fruit and production that pleases your

Father in Heaven, this is how to do it. If you want to name some steps, here are the steps.

But the thing is, these aren't mechanical steps. This isn't something we can fake. It's not a ritual we can go through.

It has to be a priority in the heart. It has to be something that we ask and seek and knock for. Lord, show me your will.

Show me your way. Show me your truth. Try me and see if there is any wicked way in me and purge me with hyssop.

Wash me and make me clean so that I can be whiter than snow, so that I can be prepared and equipped for every good work, the kind of works that genuinely please you. That should be our prayer. And Jesus is giving us the insight into how to do that.

I've heard a lot of very convicting sermons in my life. I've heard a lot of things that made me feel bad about what I was doing wrong. What I don't hear near as often is, Well, tell me how to do it right.

Tell me what is the step I'm missing. I would love to be a productive, healthy believer that God approves. I would love, at the judgment seat of Christ, for Jesus Christ to put his hand on my shoulder and say, Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Enter thou into the joy of your Lord. Tell me how to do that. Well, Jesus has done it.

It's right here. And we have to understand that some of our traditions and some of our understandings and some of our suppositions are encrustations that have developed over hundreds and hundreds of years. And we need to examine them in the light of Scripture.

Our Scripture reading this morning was on the light. What does the light do for us? It reveals. It exposes.

And Jesus talks about this when he gives this parable. Look down at verse 21. After giving this parable and after explaining this parable to his disciples, what does Jesus say? Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Isn't it to be set on a lamp stand? Isn't the purpose of bringing the light to light, to expose, to reveal, to help people see reality? And this goes hand in hand with the thing that he said between the parable and its explanation.

Look back at verse 11. To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. Think about that.

A lot of times we look at this and we say, well, God sort of chose certain people and let them in on the secret and everybody else, he sort of kept them in the dark. God picked the 12 apostles and he said, now I'm going to give you the inside scoop here on what I'm really doing. But to all

these people out here, I'm going to present it in parables and just kind of keep them dazed and confused.

Well, this might be the view that we would take when we read this because Jesus says, look, 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'll see, but they won't perceive. In hearing they'll hear, but they won't understand.

Otherwise, they might turn and repent and their sins would be forgiven them. So Jesus, we can read this in a superficial way and it sounds like, well, Jesus has sort of got a secret here and he's giving it to a few people and he's hiding it from the rest. Well, Jesus himself counters that view and that idea when he says, look, I haven't brought this lamp to put it under a basket.

Sometimes when you're a little kid, you have your cousins over. Our children and their cousins are going to be getting together here later today. And I remember when my cousins came over and it would be time to go to bed at night.

I'm sure you've seen this with your grandkids and nephews and so forth. At night, if you put all the kids in the same room, first thing you know, you come in and you say, now lights out, everybody go to sleep. And then pretty soon there's a blanket and somebody's got a flashlight on and they're playing games and they're telling each other stories and stuff under the blanket.

And it's a big secret. If you're under the blanket and the light's on, you can see what's going on, but the parents and everybody outside are in the dark. And we kind of get the idea that Jesus is under the blanket with a flashlight and his disciples and he's saying, now look, here's what God's really up to.

Here's the mystery of the kingdom, but let's keep the blanket on. And Jesus says, no, a lamp is not brought to be put under a basket or under a bed. It isn't a lamp to be put on a lampstand.

And Jesus says, look, I'm teaching in parables that this is not designed to hide. This is not designed to confuse and to conceal the truth from people who would love to have it, but I've just chosen not to give it to them. He says, there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should be light.

Jesus is teaching these parables to bring things to light. And the key to this is to recognize where this quote comes from. This quote in verse 12, seeing they may see and not perceive, hearing they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might turn and their sins be forgiven them.

Do you remember where this comes from? What book is this from? Oh, more of you know than that. What book is this from? Isaiah. This is the prophet Isaiah.

Do you remember when Isaiah wrote? Back in the early days of Israel's degeneracy, back just before the captivity of the northern kingdom. Remember Samaria and all the northern part got

conquered by the Assyrians and carried off and little Judah and Benjamin were down there in the southern part of the country all by themselves and the other ten tribes were carried off. The ten lost tribes of Israel were a result of this.

Isaiah is writing at the beginning of that period. And what does he say? Turn back to Isaiah chapter 5. This may look familiar to you, this Isaiah 5. It was in our bulletin last week as our scripture reading about the vineyard. Here's another agricultural metaphor.

Here's another parable talking about production and growth. God is speaking and he says through the mouth of the prophet, My well beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones.

He planted it with a choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst and he made a wine press in it. He expected it to bring forth good grapes but it brought forth wild grapes.

I did a little research on these grapes and there are two different Hebrew words for grape. One of them is the grape that was cultivated and was one of the staples of their culture. They made wine from it.

They did a lot of different things with it. They used it for dye and running vineyards and so forth was a very common occupation in Israel because most water and beverages were hard to maintain and hard to preserve in a pure form. They would use this fermented wine as a beverage that could be carried in skins and it would keep and it would last over a journey and it would last in the conditions of humidity and heat that prevail in that part of the world.

And it was a staple. It was a necessary part. So when someone went out and they got a hillside that is exposed to the sun all day long.

It's up there. It's visible to other people and you clear that hillside and you dig out the stones by hand. It's difficult to plow on the side of the hill and so you have to go in there by hand with tools and dig these rocks out and you stack the rocks in the center and you build them into a tower so that you can have a watchman there to keep animals and thieves and other things out of the vineyard.

You preserve it. You give it security. You nurture it.

You invest time and effort into it. You purchase the seedlings that will become the vines that will produce and you plant them in this vineyard and you expect that it will bring forth grapes. That there will be a result, a harvest from that.

But instead it brings forth wild grapes. Now these wild grapes look very similar to the real grapes and this word that's translated wild doesn't really so much mean wild. It means bitter.

There were two kinds of grape, and still are, in the Middle East that look very similar. The vines

are virtually identical but one of them is sweet and is the one that's cultivated and used and the other one is bitter and harsh to the taste and it's not good for anything. And to go to all of the trouble to develop these vines and this vineyard and to harvest the grapes and then to discover that they're bitter, you can't tell by looking.

You can only tell by tasting. It isn't what you see on the outside. It looks just like a good grape.

It's when you bite into it and you get that harsh taste and that bitter, sour bite that you realize that this was not the grape you were looking for. Not just by looking. Man looks on the outward appearance.

The Lord looks on the inside. The Lord evaluated this vineyard and He did more than look at the grapes. He bit into them and He discovered that they were sour.

And what does He say? Now inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah and He's talking to Jerusalem and Judah down in the south. They won't go out in captivity for another couple hundred years. This is being written close to 800 BC in like about 721 or so and the southern kingdom of Judah will not go into captivity until 586.

So this is 150 years or so ahead of time but it's a warning. They're already being warned. Look, I've tried your grapes and they're sour, Jerusalem, Judea.

What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then when I expected it to bring forth good grapes did it bring forth wild grapes? Now please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge. It shall be burned.

I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled. I will lay it waste. It will not be pruned or dug.

But there shall come up briars and thorns and I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. And here we have almost a reversal of that imagery. If God invests His time and His effort in us and we don't produce what He's looking for then He will make us look like what we have chosen.

In the New Testament, Jesus says that an unproductive field produces thorns and briars, things that are of no use. And God says, I'm going to make this field look like what it really is. The people of Jerusalem are growing thorns and briars in their soul.

I will cause their land to grow thorns and briars. I will make the physical, the outward, reflect what's on the inside because they have been disobedient. And I will take away the rain.

Over in Hebrews chapter 6, it says if the ground that receives the rain falling many times upon it produces only thorns and briars it is fit for being burned and is near to a curse. It's a consistent image. This agricultural idea that God invests in the field and He expects that production.

What we want to understand is what is that production? Because so often we're tempted to believe well, I must get out and work for Jesus. Let's get out and work hard for Jesus. Let's work hard for the Lord.

Let's produce some visible fruit. It isn't the visibility of the fruit that counts. It's its quality.

It's its source. Where does it come from? And we can't short-circuit the system. We can't circumvent that process of transformation in the soul and jump from hearing the Word to trying to show the appearance of fruit.

It's a decision that we make and that's what Jesus' point is here. But this chapter 5, talking about the vineyard and God's dissatisfaction with Israel because Israel has disobeyed. And He says, I've sent you the rain.

I've plowed up your stones. I have planted you and cultivated you and protected you with a hedge and a tower and you have failed to produce. That failure is the basis of what we find in chapter 6. Look at chapter 6, verse 8 of Isaiah.

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am, send me. And He said, Go and tell this people. Who is this people? It's the vineyard.

It's this crowd of bitter grape producers. It's these people that God has cultivated and protected and blessed and has sent the rain on many times through the prophets and through the teachers of the law who have not regarded His Word, have not sought to cultivate the inner life that His Word is supposed to provide. And so God sends the prophet now with a different message.

He says, Go tell this people, Keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and return and be healed. God says, Let's make the outside of them reflect what's on the inside. They've been going through the motions.

They've been trying to look like good grapes when on the inside they're not. They don't love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength, but they're trying to put on the appearance. This is why God says, I'm tired of your sacrifices.

I'm tired of your burning of incense. I'm tired of your good deeds. I'm going to make you look like on the outside what you are on the inside.

And so He sends the prophet with a message that will expose their blindness and their hardness of heart. They won't be able to fake it anymore. They won't be able to put on the outward facade of production and of righteousness anymore.

God will expose their blindness and their hardness of heart. Now turn back to Mark chapter 4. What kind of generation is living in Israel when Jesus begins His ministry? It's a generation that has had the Mosaic Law for 1,400 years. It's a generation that has had the Psalms and the Proverbs and the Wisdom Writings for 1,000 years.

It's a generation that has had the writings of the prophets for 5 and 6 and 7 and 800 years. And what have they done with it? They've wrapped it up. They've encased it.

They have made it into something God never intended it to be. And they've turned it into a superficial standard of outward righteousness. What does Jesus preach about in Matthew chapter 5? Don't do your righteousness to be seen by men.

Don't pray on the street corner. When you do a good charitable deed, don't even let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. Your Father who sees in secret, your Father who tastes the inside of the grape will reward you.

Don't operate on externalities. Don't operate on what people think. Don't operate on what people expect.

Operate on what God sees, what God thinks, and what God expects. Jesus has come into a generation that has repudiated that idea. They like the external.

They like the superficial. And because of that, Jesus is going to bring the very same message that Isaiah brings. He says, I am teaching in parables.

And this parable form of teaching is not a light under a basket. I'm not hiding the truth. I'm putting the truth out in a way that exposes and reveals people for what they are.

Because if you are a seeker, if you are asking and seeking and knocking for the truth, this parable is going to be a wonderful illustration. It's going to be a means of communication that makes the truth clear. We've seen that in our study.

How clear it is to see the way faith operates. The necessity to hear. The necessity to meditate.

The necessity to apply the Word of God. It's crystal clear through this wonderful parable that Jesus teaches. But to those who are on the outside, who is it that's on the outside? It's the people who don't want to hear.

Who don't want to meditate. Who aren't interested in that kind of application. They want to be seen by men as righteous.

They want to think of themselves as righteous. They don't genuinely ask and seek and knock. And because of that, these parables make no sense to them.

Because they're not in tune with the truth of God. They don't understand God's plan and God's purpose. And so these same parables that enlighten, these same parables that illuminate and illustrate the truth and make it so clear for us, completely confuse and amaze and confound this other type of person.

This parable is a light on the lampstand and it shines and it reveals. It's either going to reveal the truth to a willing, receptive soul, or it's going to reveal the blindness and the hardness of that soul. And when Jesus, in verse 10, it says, when He was alone, now this is kind of a conundrum here.

It says, when He was alone, those around Him with the disciples. Now how can you be alone and have people around you? What is it talking about? When He was away from the crowd. He was alone by contrast with these huge crowds that we've studied in the past.

When He was alone, those around Him with the twelve. This is not just the twelve disciples. This isn't the chosen few, the future founders of the church.

This is those who stayed with Jesus after the fanfare, after the healings, after the fun part of the day was over with. Those who stuck with Him and followed Him to hear more of what He had to say because they were hungry, because they were seeking, because they were asking and they were knocking. They're still with Jesus when He's teaching and talking and explaining, not when He's performing great mighty miracles.

And so they are there and Jesus says, to you all, to you who are here sitting at My feet in the posture of a disciple to hear and absorb the truth. To you it has been given to understand. Not just the twelve.

All of those who stuck with the Lord. To you it has been given. But those who are outside, those who have come for the wrong reasons, who are superficial, who are thrill seekers, who are out for an experience.

It hasn't been given to them. Why? Because these parables expose their blindness and expose their hardness of heart. This is a status that's already present.

God is not hiding the truth from people who want it. He is using the truth to expose those people who don't want it and to teach those who do. So what is the fruit of faith? What is the production that Jesus is looking for? Look down in verse 21-25.

This lamp has been set up on the lampstand. There is nothing hidden which will not be revealed. Now what is this that is hidden? It's not the externalities.

We can all see what we're doing. We can see each other attending church. We can see that hand slip in and out of the offering plate.

We can see that person going around and teaching or preaching or availing themselves of

opportunity for ministry. And we can draw conclusions from that about one another. We can be critical of one another and judge one another.

Or we can hold one another up as great heroes of the faith based on these external things. But that's not the way God measures. Those things can be counterfeited.

If you want to talk about witnessing and you want to talk about outreach, look at some of the cults who ride bicycles and have knocked on my door far more times than any evangelical Christian ever has or ever will. You can't measure by those external things. And God doesn't measure by those.

Those are reflections and manifestations of something on the inside. And God doesn't worry with the outside because He's got a clear view of the inside. Nothing which is hidden exists which will not be revealed.

There's nothing that has been kept secret but that it will come to light. What brings it to light? It's the truth of the Word of God. It's that light shining in a bright place.

It's that light that we read about in our Scripture reading this morning. Where does it shine? It shines in our soul. It's the thoughts and intents of our heart that God is examining and evaluating.

You know what the great thing about this is? When we have opportunities for outreach and for genuine ministry and for genuine impact in the plan of God, we're equipped because we're properly motivated. We're oriented. We have the right priorities.

We can discern the relative priority of an opportunity in our family, an opportunity in the life of an unbeliever, an opportunity for ministry to fellow believers. When all of those hit us at once, we have the wherewithal in our soul to sort those out and say, God wants me here. God wants me here.

This is an opportunity where God can use me. We have the right thinking and the right priorities. We have divine guidance.

The Word of God in our soul takes the mystery out of the plan of God and the will of God in different circumstances because we know. We know how our Father thinks and we know what His objectives are. That light shines in our soul and reveals the thoughts and intents behind what we do.

And the great thing is, there are periods in our life where we have lots of external opportunities, lots of potential for ministry, lots of people to influence, lots of chances to speak the truth to one another in love and to share the gospel with unbelievers. There are other periods in our life where we feel like Moses in prison or we feel like David out with the sheep or Elijah by the brook Cherub. Isn't it surprising how many of the great figures of the Bible have had long periods in their life where they weren't around anybody? God was forging something in their soul.

God was teaching them something inside to prepare them for things on the outside. And that's where it counts. Some of us today don't have the opportunities that we once had.

We're not in the foreign countries. We're not working for the missions that we once did. We don't have the chance to speak to the people that we once spoke to.

Our circle of influence has shrunk. Our physical abilities are limited. It doesn't matter.

That's not what God uses to measure. We have the same soul. We have the same Word of God.

We have the same Holy Spirit. We have the same opportunity to bear that fruit and be a 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold believer because it's not measured by what we do. Thank God when we have opportunities to do those things and we do it out of the right motivation, but it's not the deeds that count.

It's the thoughts and intents of the heart. Jesus pointed this out on the negative side of the coin. You can commit sins without doing the overt act.

If you look at a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery with her in your heart because it's the heart that is the battlefield. It's the heart that is the arena. It's the heart where the issue is made or broken, where the battle is won or lost.

So, take heart. Each of us has an opportunity today and tomorrow to think about what we've heard, the truth of the Word of God, to assimilate it and absorb it and meditate on it and let it change us on the inside and bear the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience that require no external circumstances to produce. We don't have to wait for tomorrow when there are more people in the church.

We don't have to wait for tomorrow when there will be a children's ministry and a college ministry and an outreach to the charities and so forth. We don't have to live in tomorrow and stall today. We have the opportunity today to be equipped for every good work by that which every joint supplies, by the Word of God that is broadcast in our souls.

What a great opportunity it is. What a great challenge it is to realize that God has left us here for a purpose. No matter how old we are, no matter what our strengths or limitations are, our soul is intact.

Our faculties are intact. We can think about the Word of God. We can incorporate it into our souls and we can produce that genuine fruit of the Spirit.

That's what God is looking for. That's what He's hoping to find when He bites into the grapes. That sweet savor of righteousness that God the Holy Spirit produces in us through God's Word.

Let's close now in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You this morning that You have chosen to use us for Your purposes. You have incorporated us into Your plan.

You have chosen to use us even though in many cases we are earthen vessels with many flaws and with many imperfections and many limitations. You have chosen to place the treasure of Your Word and Your Spirit within us. You've chosen to use us to reflect Your glory.

We pray that the things that we have studied this morning will become a part of the resources in our soul. We pray that our lives will reflect Your glory, that we will be a fruitful vineyard, a fruitful field, and that that fruit that we bear will be glorifying to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and will last for all eternity. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.