

95-04-09Mark

Father, we thank You and praise You for the greatness of Your grace. We thank You that You have manifested Your love toward us in so many different ways, first and foremost through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are mindful this week of His earthly ministry, which culminated in such a dramatic fashion in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Passover.

And at that time, our Lord was arrested, was tried, was falsely convicted and was crucified. And we know that on that occasion, He not only suffered physical death, but He bore our sins and suffered the penalty for all of our iniquity, all of our wrongdoing. And in so doing, He secured our salvation and He achieved the great victory of all time, which reflects Your glory and enables us to have a relationship with You.

And we pray this morning as we look at the life of Jesus Christ and at His teaching, that these things will be real to us, that they will make Jesus Christ real to us. And that in that process, we will be conformed to His image and we'll be able to live lives that accomplish Your purpose. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We are in Mark chapter 4. We have completed our study of the parable of the sower, the seed and the soils. We saw the process of faith that that parable reveals, the three primary decision points that each of us faces all through our lives each and every day.

We face the decision as to whether or not we are going to expose ourselves to God's truth, whether we are going to think about it and meditate on it or not. What is going to be the basis of our thinking? What will we use to measure our circumstances, to measure our options, to base our actions on? What will we use? Will we use the truth that God has revealed, the invisible warfare that is going on around us, our place in God's family, all of the resources that God has placed at our disposal? Will those be factors in our daily thinking, in our daily lives? That was Jesus' reason for teaching this parable. He said, if you can understand this parable, you will be able to understand the others.

But if you don't understand this basic concept of how faith works and what its role is in our lives, how can you understand any of the parables? And then after he explained this parable to his disciples, which included not only the twelve, but all those who were pursuing an understanding of the truth, we noted in verse 10 of chapter 4, when Jesus was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parable. There were people sitting there hearing the parable. They didn't understand it, and they cared enough about it to pursue, to seek the meaning, to understand it so that they could put it into application in their own lives.

And that interest, that desire is what separates those who grow and produce from those who don't. It's what distinguishes those of us who are 30-fold believers and 60-fold believers and 100-fold believers. How badly do we want to please God? How much do we care about what Jesus

did for us? Do we desire to reflect his glory in our lives? If we do, we'll pursue, we will seek, we will ask, we will not.

And those things will be open to us. These people did that. After Jesus had left the crowds, he was away from the seaside, they asked him, Lord, what do you mean by this? Help us to understand it.

He explained it to them. We have that wonderful teaching of Jesus that is illustrated in the relationship of parents and children. He said, which of you, if your child comes and asks you for bread, will give him a stone or a snake or a scorpion? If we, being mortal human beings, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give good things, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit? To lead us into the truth, to give us an understanding of who God is and what he's up to in human history and in our individual lives.

And that asking and seeking and knocking is not for material things. It's not for promotion. It's not for success.

It's for understanding. That's what these people have done. And they received this great, clear explanation of what Jesus is talking about.

And he remarks on this in verse 21 when he says, Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? Jesus did not come to teach in parables and confuse people. His parables reveal the truth. Now, it can be the truth in one of two areas.

It can either reveal the truth of God, reveal the truth about God and his plan, or it can reveal the truth of the hardness of our hearts, of our self-induced blindness and deafness. We went over to Isaiah and we reviewed the origin of this quote that he gives in verse 12. Seeing they may see and not perceive.

Hearing they may hear and not understand. The failure to complete that process of faith, to make the Word of God important enough in our thinking to let it change us, to let it guide us when we think and when we decide. And now in verse 24, if your Bible is divided like mine is, you have sort of a paragraph there, a section from verse 21 to 25 or thereabouts.

And then 26 seems to start a new section. If I were dividing this, I would do it differently. And I would include verses 24 and 25 with the parable that Jesus begins in verse 26.

But you will notice that in this section, Jesus emphasizes hearing over and over again. We have so many verbs here for hearing, for listening, for paying attention and seeing. And that doesn't take a Rhodes scholar to identify that Jesus' focus and his purpose in presenting all of this material is to get us to stop and think, to get us to listen, to recognize the importance of perceiving the truth.

And we often as believers put our Bible study or our Bible reading or our personal devotions or our conversation about the Word of God with other believers, that's one of many sort of equally important things in our life. Well, it's important to do that. It's important to pray.

It's important to give. It's important to witness. It's important to assemble.

It's important to do these various other things. And we have our spiritual shelf and our soul and we have all these little boxes there that compose our Christian life. And we kind of make sure that we've acknowledged our responsibility in each of those areas and we say, okay, and we close the closet door and go out and live our lives.

And we forget that these are not identical things and they're not of equal importance and of equal weight. Instead, our life is a process. Jesus doesn't compare it to loaves of bread on a row on a shelf or any other article side by side.

He says your life is a tree. It's a growing thing. It's a living thing.

It has roots. It has a stalk. And it has production.

And all of this implies process. And one of the things that we understand from that is that if we know the process, we will know how to keep that process from failing. We will know how to keep our roots from shriveling or our trunk from being attacked or our production from being stopped in some way.

So notice, Jesus is teaching these parables and what is his subject? He says, listen, behold, a sower went forth to sow. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear. Then he explains the parable.

And after the explanation, what does he say? He that has an ear to hear, let him hear. How much more emphasis could Jesus put on the importance of perceiving the truth? He says, when I go away, I'm going to send you another comforter to help you perceive the truth. He's not here to work miracles.

He's not here to do the spectacular and the unusual. He's here to help you perceive the truth. He will remind you of the things that I've taught.

He'll bring it to your mind. He will lead you into all truth. He will convict of sin and righteousness and judgment.

Those are three areas of truth that are critical for us to understand. So now, when he begins in verse 24, he says, take heed what you hear. Notice this, of all the things Jesus could have said, he's talking about production in the Christian life, he doesn't say, take heed what you do.

He doesn't say, take heed how you appear. These are naturally the things that tend to come to our mind. We want to take heed, well, how do I look? What do people think? Am I hitting the

marks so that I won't be criticized or I won't be thought of as a second-class Christian or as falling down in my responsibilities? How do I look? How do I appear? What am I doing to be sure that I'm doing the right thing? Jesus doesn't say, take heed what you do.

He says, take heed what you hear. Why is that? He is emphasizing again that there is a process that takes place. Is it important to do the right thing? Is it important to be perceived as living a righteous life? Yes, it is.

Of course it is. But Jesus knows and Jesus is teaching us that those things have to be the result of something. It has to start right in the center of our soul.

And it is easy for us to fake it. It is so easy for us to do on the outside what conforms and what is acceptable and not meet God's standard. God does not judge us by what we do.

He judges us by what we think. And when we think the right thing, what we do will reflect right thinking and will glorify God. But we can do those very same actions and it's meaningless.

It's worthless. It's wood, hay and stubble fit only to be burned. Identical same activity.

Identical same effort. In many cases, greater effort because we are running in our own steam without the Holy Spirit, working and doing and pressuring each other to work and to do. And we measure the visible signs of how many were there, how much was there, how long did it last and so forth.

And to God, it's a moot point. It's academic because it isn't coming from what He plants inside us. It isn't coming from His seed.

It isn't empowered by His Spirit and it doesn't reflect His glory. And we can work ourselves to death. There's a little poem.

I'm not sure I can repeat it because he mentions a specific denomination, so you can just fill in the blank with the denomination of your choice. But a long time ago, I heard a little poem that said, Mary had a little lamb. It would have been a sheep, but it joined the church and died from lack of sleep.

And that's what we often do. We know that there are things that should be done in God's plan. We see them and we say, I've got to go do those things.

That's the fulfillment of God's plan to do. And we get busy doing it and we wind up running in our own steam and we can literally kill ourselves in the execution of things that we believe to be good and miss God's purpose in our life and fail to reflect His glory. And that's what we're going to see in this parable this morning.

Jesus is presenting this. It's like a wonderful gemstone. And you look at it from one side and

under the light you turn it and you see it from another side.

And then you turn it and you see it from another side. And each time you turn that gemstone, you see new facets and new reflections of beauty that come from within it. Jesus is going to use these three parables to talk about growing things and seeds and sowing to take one concept and show it to us from different angles and try to make it clear to us.

These parables are lights on the lampstand to reveal, to enable us to understand God's plan and to fulfill it in our own lives. So when He says here in verse 24, take heed what you hear, He's striking at the very heart of the matter. What is the society that Jesus is in? He's in Judaism.

It's the Mosaic Law after a thousand years. It has the barnacles and the incrustations and the distortions and the accretions that have come over a thousand years of use by human beings. And it has become a religion of works.

Come to synagogue. Come to the temple. Offer the sacrifices.

Pray on the street corners. Drop your money into the money receptacles there in the courtyard outside the temple. Pray.

Wear sackcloth and ashes. Be sure that you are seen when you do these things because we want everybody to be sure and understand that we Jews are righteous. We do the right things.

We are the great beacons of the righteousness of God. And they would justify this on the basis of the Scriptures, the Old Testament Law. Does it not say to bind God's Word on my hand and on my head? Well, here it is.

I've got it in a little leather pouch tied right to my hand and right to my head. What a terrific picture of what we tend to do with God's Word. We literalize it.

We bring it into the physical world and we think that if we just get the actions down, if we just get the physical results down, that's what God is looking for. What is the kingdom of God? That's the question Jesus is answering here. What did Jesus come to preach? Remember back in Mark 1.15? This is the keynote address of Jesus Christ when He begins His ministry.

Mark 1.15, what does it say? The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your mind and believe the good news.

He doesn't say change your behavior. That was John's message. Remember John the Baptist out in the wilderness? What should we do in keeping with this baptism? We've just been dunked in the Jordan.

What should we do? And He says, if you're a soldier, do this. If you're a landowner, do that. And John summarizing and embodying the whole Old Testament system says this is what you should

do in keeping with repentance.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Jesus is preaching the kingdom of God and He says, look, it has to start on the inside. We see the reverse of this coin, don't we, in Jesus' teaching about sin.

Remember what Jesus says? If you look at a woman, to lust after her in your heart, you have committed adultery already. Why does He say that? One man walking down the street. One lady walking down the street.

They pass and the sin of adultery has been committed. Nobody saw it. Nobody detected it.

It was invisible. How did it happen? It is accomplished just as surely as if it had been fulfilled physically. Why is it real? Why is it there? Because it happened in the soul.

And what goes on in the soul is what counts in God's eyes. Man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord is looking at the heart.

He is measuring the thoughts and the intents of the heart. God's desire, giving us His Word and His Spirit, is to rehabilitate the thoughts and the intents of the heart. Why? Because if those are changed, if we are transformed on the inside and we have new standards, new priorities, new purpose and meaning and goals in our life, our actions will follow and those actions will be worthy, righteous reflections of what God has done on the inside.

Anybody can do good works. You can think of some cults that visit your doorstep every so often and they have a standard of morality. They have a standard of righteousness.

They have a standard of works. And if you want to get out and work, they will outwork you. If you want to get out and evangelize, they will out-evangelize you.

They can do anything we can do in the physical realm. I went back, when I started thinking about this, I went back and read where Moses faced Pharaoh right before the Exodus. Do you remember that? God had spoken to him out of the burning bush and had given him some confirming signs and He said, take your brother Aaron and go talk to Pharaoh.

And so Moses goes and Pharaoh scoffs and says, I'm not going to let the people go. So Moses takes his rod, I think Aaron actually, takes his rod and casts it down and it turns into a snake. And then the magicians of Egypt cast their rods down and their rods turned into a snake.

Now this is an amazing thing. Here are these pagan magicians and they can produce the same outward sign that God's people produce. And so then later on, Moses tells Pharaoh there's going to be a plague of frogs.

And he calls up frogs and frogs come up out of the Nile and so forth. Pharaoh's Egyptians call up

frogs out of the Nile. They do the very same thing that God's man of the hour is doing.

They can duplicate up to a point the same thing that people of God can do. What distinguishes us? What makes us different? If we're doing good works and cult people are doing good works, what is the difference? Well, it's all good because somebody's getting the benefit and so forth. Absolutely not.

The charity that is accomplished by unbelievers does no good of intrinsic value because it does not glorify God. The charity that is engaged in by cults, we look at it and we say, well, somebody benefited. How short-sighted we are.

What is the issue in this life? It is God and His glory, His reputation, His work that counts. Anything that we consider good that has nothing to do with God is not good. That's measuring by a human standard.

We're measured by a divine standard and Jesus is giving us the key to meeting that divine standard and He says you've got to start on the inside. You've got to be transformed in your thinking, your priorities, what you dwell on, what you base your decisions on, what you think is important. How you view other people depends on this.

How can we not bear a grudge against someone? How can we not be bitter and not be angry? How can we say, I'm not bitter, I'm not bitter, I'm not bitter? It doesn't work. We have to be transformed. Something supernatural has to hit us in the center of our soul and take away the antagonism, take away the hatred, take away the bitterness and replace it with God's divine love.

We can't do that for ourselves, but we can choose to let God do it and this is how. He says, take heed what you hear. I was sitting in the waiting room at the hospital.

Many of you have done this and you know that there are lots of people in the hospital for different things and their families and their associates come in and out and you hear all of these conversations that you would normally never hear associated with people that you might not associate with or see or be around and conversations take place and I heard people's opinions about the court trials that are going on of famous people but the most disturbing thing is you have a loved one in there and they're undergoing a medical procedure. Somebody else's loved ones are sitting there and as soon as you walk in they start telling you horror stories about their loved one and oh, well they did this and this came loose and then they tried that and that squirted all over the room and they forgot to do this and that's just horrifying and we're there attempting to have faith, to be calm, to encourage one another and you've got these nightmare stories going on and so forth and we make a choice. What am I going to base my peace of mind on? How am I going to view this situation? Am I going to base it on what I know about God and His plan and my relationship with God or am I going to base it on the experience of these people with this hospital at some time in the past? We make that choice, don't we? And we choose to panic and say I'd better get in there.

I'd better watch because these people are incompetent and if what this lady says is true, my goodness, there's no telling what can happen. We choose what to base our thinking on, don't we? And Jesus says, take heed what you hear. Take heed.

Be careful. Monitor what you hear because the standard with which you measure what you hear is the standard that is going to be measured back to you. The measure that you use will be measured to you.

To you who hear, more will be given. Now this concept of measuring, Jesus uses this a couple of times. If you turn back to Matthew 7, He talks about this.

He says in Matthew 7.1, Judge not that you be not judged. Now this seems like kind of two opposite commands. Be careful what you hear.

Discern. Be critical. Judge what you hear, but judge not lest you be judged.

And what are we talking about here? The difference between discernment and judging. We've discussed this in the past and we know that there is a difference between acknowledging that something is right or something is wrong and deciding to be the judge who will pass sentence and execute sentence for that crime. It is important for us to evaluate the people around us and to make judgments about whether they are in the right or in the wrong.

How can we take heed what we hear if we are completely indiscriminate? We assume that everyone is good when we know that everyone has a sinful nature. It's important for us to be discerning, to identify the wolves in sheep's clothing, to identify those who are false professors. There are times when we are supposed to separate from fellow believers because they are in apostasy.

You can't do that without making a judgment about where that person stands. So what does Jesus mean in Matthew 7.1 when He says, Judge not lest you be judged. It does not mean stop evaluating, stop measuring with God's righteous standard and drawing a conclusion.

What it does mean is do not pass sentence. Do not execute sentence on a person. Do not decide that you will now inflict a penalty on that person because you have decided that they are wrong and they need to pay for that wrong in some fashion.

So you will cut them down to other people or you will damage their reputation or spread innuendo or gossip or something about them and reduce their stature in the eyes of other people. Or we decide to ostracize someone. We will withdraw the benefit of our presence and our support from someone because we have detected some flaw or some wrong that they have done.

We decide that we will create the penalty and execute the penalty. That is judging. When we inflict a penalty on another person because of a perceived wrong, we judge.

And Jesus says, Judge not or you will be judged. And we understand that from the reverse. He says if you judge, you will be judged.

Does God not discern what is right and what is wrong in our lives? He does. Does He always inflict a penalty on us when we fail? He does not. Do we get what we really deserve when we fail, when we hurt one another, when we sin against the Lord God? We do not.

But if we start inflicting penalties on other people, God will start inflicting penalties on us. Judge not lest ye be judged. And then in verse 2 He says, For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged.

And with the measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but you do not consider the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Let me remove the speck from your eye and look at a plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite. First remove the plank from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Notice He doesn't say, Turn a blind eye to the speck. Turn a blind eye to the plank. We are to evaluate ourselves.

We are to evaluate one another. But we are not to pass judgment, to execute judgment on one another. And that's where we cross the line from discernment to judging.

What a great thing it is that we do see each other's weaknesses and we can pray for one another. We can build one another up and encourage one another. It's important to know where we stand, to bear one another's burdens when the occasion calls for it.

But notice the principle here. With the measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. We know from the teaching that the Lord gives us about prayer and forgiveness that if we do not forgive our brother, we ourselves will not be forgiven.

The extent to which we are forgiving is the extent to which we are forgiven. So there's a principle there of, in a sense, it reminds me, Dr. Wright will appreciate this, it reminds me of a transistor in an electrical circuit. Don't panic.

I think I can explain it to where it will be understandable. What a transistor is, is it's an amplifier. There's a circuit on one side of the transistor and there's a circuit on another.

On this side of the transistor, there's a very small current, very small. Maybe the current generated by a needle on a record or the head of a magnetic device like a tape recorder or a cassette player. Very tiny voltages there.

When it passes through the transistor, the nature of the transistor is that as this voltage goes up and down in its very tiny way, there's a big voltage on the other side of the transistor. And as this

one wavers, this one wavers in the same way. And so this little tiny circuit controls what happens in this great big circuit.

And the measure that you measure with on the small side of the transistor determines what happens on the big side. When there's a dip in the small voltage, there's a dip in the big voltage. And this is how you can take something like a record needle and through an amplifier have sound coming out your speakers, have enough electricity to make those speakers move.

In a sense, that's what this principle does in our spiritual life. The decisions that we make in the privacy of our own soul about each other and about the Word of God, that measure that we measure with is determinative in our lives. It's a whole different concept than some of us have grown up with where, well, I basically just got to be sure that I've got good actions going and I'm all set.

We've got a transistor in our soul. We've got a decision-making responsibility in our soul to observe the priorities that God puts before us, to value His Word, to value each other, to not hurt one another, to not judge one another, to not put pressure on one another and try to get inside their soul and make their decisions for them by exerting external pressure. It's our responsibility to let God make changes inside our soul and that will be magnified in our lives and our actions will take care of themselves.

Look what Jesus says, to you who hear, more will be given. Who's He talking to? He says, you who hear. Who's the audience here? These are the people that followed Him after the crowds left.

These are the people that He explained the parable to. They're still there after the day is over, after the crowds have dispersed and they've left the boat and they've gone back probably to the house. These people followed Jesus, not just the twelve, but those who were following and were interested.

Jesus says, you are the ones who hear. To you who hear, more will be given. If you value the Word of God, you ask for it, you seek for it, you knock on the door and say, Lord, give me understanding.

Help me to perceive your plan and your purpose. Help it to make a change in my life. It's important to us.

We set it as a priority. When we do that, more will be given to us. But to those who have not, even what they have will be taken away.

Look in verse 25. Whoever has, to him, more will be given. This is what happens when you plant seed in a field.

You have a bushel of seed, you plant it. All of those seeds, if they germinate and come up,

they're going to have stocks full of seeds. And you wind up multiplying what you have.

If you have seed, you nurture it. It grows up and produces. You have more than what you had when you started.

But if you have not, if you're the hard-packed soil and the seed gets carried away, even what you had is gone. And so we polarize. We wind up heading toward the extreme.

We will either seek the things of God and grow and produce and reflect God's glory, or we will regress. And even the things that we do understand will drift away in our thinking and become less and less important. There's no sense straddling in God's plan.

There's no treading water and just kind of staying in one spot. We are going to go one direction or the other based on what we decide. It's our choice.

God's grace has made it possible for us to be a fruitful and fruitful field. But it depends on if we take heed to what we hear. Now in verse 26, the kingdom of God.

Jesus is teaching the kingdom of God. This is His subject. He told us in chapter 1, verse 15, the kingdom of God is near.

Change your mind and believe the good news. In chapter 1, verse 38, He said, I want to go to the nearby villages and preach there also. This is the reason I came forth, to preach the kingdom, to teach people how the kingdom of God works.

I'm not here just to heal everybody's physical afflictions. I'm here to teach people how to live in God's kingdom, how to live in a way to reflect God's glory. In chapter 2, verse 17, He said, I did not come to call the righteous, the people who are righteous in their own eyes and don't think they have a problem.

He said, I have come to call sinners to repentance. People who recognize that they have a need and they're seeking, they're looking for something. Those are the people that Jesus came to call.

In chapter 2, verse 22, He says, new wine must be put in new wineskins. People with the old way of thinking, people still thinking in terms of the law and the abuse of the law, that it all depends on what I do, Jesus can't teach them anything. They're stretched out wineskins.

New wine, the teaching of the kingdom of God, that it depends on what you think, has to be put in people that are receptive, who are willing to flex and change and accept that teaching and let it change them. In chapter 2, verse 27, He was talking about the Sabbath and He said, Don't you understand? The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And what is He saying there? God did not invent the standards of righteousness of the Mosaic Law and say, you know, these standards are important and I'm going to create some people to observe these standards and to support these standards and to support these sacrifices and these offerings and these

ways of behavior because the big thing is these standards.

I want these standards to stand up and shine. That's not it at all. He wants His people to stand up and shine.

And the Mosaic Law was a way of teaching them and instructing them. The Sabbath was the day, we went back and looked in the Ten Commandments when they're given, it explains, on the Sabbath day, stop your work. Sit at home.

Don't let your servants work. Meditate on your God. Think about the Lord.

Get yourself back in the truth and let it change you on the inside. That's what the Sabbath is supposed to do for you. You are not a slave to the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a teaching tool for you, Jesus told us. And He's emphasizing that so many different ways here. And in verse 26, He says, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day and the seed should sprout and grow.

He Himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

But when the grain ripens immediately, He puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. We're talking about the same thing here. And this really connects with verse 24 and 25.

Take heed what you hear. The measure that you measure with, it will be measured to you. If you have, more will be given.

If you have not, even what you have will be taken away. And then Jesus illustrates that truth with this picture. Now, this case is a little bit different.

And we notice a few details about this sower, this person with the seed, that helps us understand what Jesus is saying. Now, there are lots of people that have lots of opinions about this parable and what it means and that it's talking about the growth of the kingdom and so forth. Let me just ask you one question.

Here you are. You have these people in Israel. These are the twelve disciples and the other people that really want to know, how can I please God? How can I live in a way that pleases God? They've stayed late.

They're running through the dinner hour now, long after the teaching service should have ended. They're still there. They're still asking, what is Jesus going to tell these people? Is He going to say, let me give you some theology about the dispensation of the church and that it's going to start and it's going to grow and it will start small and get bigger and so forth.

That's not a primary interest to these people. What do they need to know? How can God change me on the inside? How can my life be different and be pleasing to God? And that's what Jesus is teaching them. They have asked for bread.

He's not going to give them a rock or a stone or He's not going to give them some other valid truth that doesn't meet their needs. He's meeting the need of people who are seeking. And He's telling them, this is what the kingdom of God is like.

This is what God's rule in your soul is like. This is how it works. And in this case, the man scattering seed is not the same as the sower that we had in the previous picture.

It's very specific. It says the sower goes forth to sow. It calls him a... It's from the Greek word sperazo, which means to... It always reminds me of spearing into the ground.

You poke a hole in the ground and plant the seed. You sow the seed. And it says the sower went forth to sow.

And it concentrates on his identity as the sower. And this is a picture of Jesus Christ Himself and His delegates who dispense the truth. That seed that is scattered.

But here it says this is a man. It doesn't call him a sower. It says it's a man.

And it doesn't say that he's sowing. It uses the word ballo. And we get the word ball like baseball or basketball from the Greek word ballo.

He's throwing the seed. He's scattering the seed. It has a different idea here.

He's casting it forth. It doesn't have the same sort of purpose and complete knowledge and understanding that's implied by the sower. And he scatters it on the ground and he sleeps by night and rises by day.

This doesn't remind us of God, does it? God never sleeps. We have Scripture to that effect. But this is a man.

He sleeps by night. He rises by day. And the seed grows up and he doesn't know how.

This also doesn't remind us of God. God knows exactly what's going on at all times. This reminds us of an actual human being.

This is the way our lives work. We sleep and rise. There are a lot of things we can't figure out.

We don't understand. But this man scatters the seed. He sleeps by night.

He rises by day. And the seed by itself sprouts and grows. The seed knows what to do.

It knows how to orient itself by gravity and by sunlight. It sends roots down and branches up instead of vice versa. It knows to get its stalk and stem growing and get some leaves out and do some photosynthesis before it tries to produce fruit.

All of that power, all of that design is contained in that tiny seed. The man doesn't have to know that. He doesn't have to come out and type on a keyboard and program the seed and tell it, OK, now kick out a leaf here and a leaf here and get your fruit growing.

It's in the seed. The power, the design is in the seed. All you have to do is scatter it.

He doesn't know how it grows. He just knows that it does. The earth yields crops by itself.

First the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, who gets the benefit of all of that design and all of that growth and all of that great chemical reaction that takes place in the production that takes chemicals in the soil and converts it to useful grain and useful food? Who gets the benefit? The man comes back and puts in the sickle and reaps the harvest. What is Jesus telling us here? The seed is still the seed of the Word, but we're looking at it from a different angle.

We've taken our gemstone and we're looking at it from a different angle. What a wonderful thing it is that the plan of God does not depend on our design, our plan, our efforts. In Colossians 2, we saw Paul say, As you have received Christ, so walk.

How did we receive Christ? What does it say in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9? You all know this verse. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. Doesn't it remind you of this picture? Not of yourselves.

It is a gift of God. Not of works. Lest any man should take credit to himself.

Lest any man should boast. That's the way the Word of God works in our souls. If we are faithful to scatter the seed, it will do its work.

It will change us. There's a philosophy that says, Oh, you spend too much time in Bible study. You're going to sit get soaked and sour.

You're going to stagnate. You're going to become ingrown. I challenge anybody to take in the supernatural, living Word of God into your soul and see if you can contain it.

See if you can keep a lid on it and not have it change you, not have it motivate you. If you genuinely take it in and meditate on it, make it the object of your faith, you see how long you can refrain from doing anything pleasing to God. You can't do it.

It's like trying to contain dynamite. In fact, that word dunamis is used of the Word of God. It is living and powerful.

And if you get that alive and powerful word in your soul, in other words, what am I saying? You cannot sit soaked and sour. If you are truly soaking, you will not sour. You will grow.

The seed knows what to do when it gets in the ground. It will produce the stalk and the leaf and the head. And what happens? We produce and reap the benefit of that fruit of righteousness.

We've got to understand the importance of the truth in our lives. It's not one of many priorities. It's the most important thing.

How do we come to know Jesus Christ as a person? We have to spend time with Him. We have to understand His thinking. And this is how we do it.

Nothing more frustrating than being told what you should be and not being told how to get there. You should enjoy church. You should enjoy service.

You should enjoy fellowship. You should enjoy Bible study. You should enjoy all of these things.

And I say, well, I know I should, but I don't. I can't generate the steam to make myself happy doing this. Well, where does it come from? Jesus is telling us right here.

Get those seeds planted in the soil. The seed knows what to do when it gets there. You don't have to know how it works.

When we learn the Word of God, it will change us in ways that we're not even aware of. It will do its work inside us and produce fruit that we never intended, that we didn't anticipate, that we didn't foresee because it's the work of God who knows all and sees all, and it's all incorporated into His great plan. Well, we'll resume a week after next and see the mustard seed.

We're going to see all the biblical occurrences of mustard seeds and figure out what exactly is going on with this tiny seed and the large tree and who the birds of the air really are. But at this point now, let's bow our heads and close our eyes and reflect on the fact that Jesus Christ came for a purpose. His purpose was to reveal the Father.

Jesus said in John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me. Jesus is that opening, that doorway to the throne room of God the Father.

When He was crucified on the cross, as we think about this week and Easter and the crucifixion, the resurrection, we recognize that Jesus did something unprecedented. He did something once and for all on the cross. He paid the penalty for all of our sins.

He enabled us to be declared righteous, to be entered into God's family, and to have fellowship with the God of the universe, God the Father. It comes through faith in Jesus Christ. There's nothing we can add.

There's no work that we can do. There is no contribution that we can make to salvation. The only thing we do is accept it.

When God the Holy Spirit made the issue of Jesus Christ clear, many of us saw that and accepted it. And if you see that issue clearly today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ and trusted His work on your behalf, we pray for you and we urge you to consider what Jesus Christ has done, the free gift of grace that requires no additives, no additions, simply accepting. And we know that after salvation, we live in the same way that we were saved.

We live by faith. We live by accepting what Jesus Christ does for us. And in so doing, we are given by God a life of meaning and purpose and definition.

And those actions that we do perform reflect God's glory and will redound to His praise for all eternity. Father, we thank You for the privilege of looking into the truth of Your Word. We thank You for the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, who enables us as fallen human beings with mortal souls to understand the great supernatural spiritual truth that is contained in this book.

We pray that in the coming days, these truths will be active in our soul and will change us and that as a result, the Word will sprout and grow and we will be productive. And our production will be that truth that pleases You and that remains and reflects Your glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.