

95-04-23Mark

Father, we come before your throne once again with gratitude in our hearts. We thank you for all the many blessings that you have bestowed on us. We thank you for your preserving grace.

We thank you for your healing hands. We thank you that you hear and answer prayer. We pray now that as we look into the truth of your word, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our souls, that it will transform our thinking and cause us to reflect that stability, that faith, hope, and love that is our heritage as members of your family.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. Turn with me, if you will, this morning to Mark chapter 4, where we continue our study of the career of Jesus Christ as it's recorded in Mark's Gospel. You may recall that this is an interesting book because Mark was a follower of the Apostle Peter, and we can almost envision Mark following Peter as he went to the towns and villages and preaching and taking notes in his notebook from which he constructed this Gospel.

We know that many of the things that we find in this account are eyewitness accounts based on Peter's experience as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We saw that Mark's account begins, in fact he calls it the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the account of John the Baptist. John is out there at the Jordan River.

He is proclaiming the approach of the Kingdom of God. He says, Repent, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He is preaching a baptism of repentance.

He's dunking people in the muddy water of the Jordan River. This is a strange and new event in Israel, and thousands of people flock out there to the river to see what is this wild-haired man in a camel-skin coat and snacking on locusts and wild honey, and proclaiming this new piece of information, proclaiming the approach of the King of Israel, the Messiah, the one that they have waited for for so many years. And John is out there, and yet John says, I'm not the main attraction, I am just the teaser, I'm the preview, I'm the commercial that is preceding the main event.

There's one coming after me whose shoe I'm not worthy to buckle. He is greater than I. I baptize you with water. I dunk you in this Jordan River water.

When He comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And before very long, the Lord Jesus Christ did show up, and John identified Him. He said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He must increase, I must decrease. And John encouraged his followers to go follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that some of John the Baptist's followers included Peter and Andrew, James and John.

And it's significant that Peter's recollection and his history of the ministry of Jesus Christ starts with the ministry of John the Baptist, because that's where Peter's own experience began as a disciple of John. And he took John's recommendation, and when John identified the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter was one of the first of the disciples to follow Him. We have seen Jesus exercise His authority and identify Himself as Israel's Messiah.

There had been writings in existence for hundreds of years in Israel written by Isaiah the prophet, Ezekiel the prophet, going all the way back to the Law of Moses. All of that ritual, those animal sacrifices, and all of these strange, unique things that were a part of the worship life of Israel were identification marks. They were prophecies.

They were marks and signs pointing the way to God's Son coming into the world. They explained what His work would be. He wasn't here on a crusade to feed the poor.

He wasn't here on a crusade to heal the sick. He was here to solve man's greatest problem, which is our inability to overcome our corrupt nature. Our inability to approach and to please the God of the universe, the God who made us.

We don't have that capability. We are born in sin. We inherit a corrupt nature.

This problem was in existence long before any of us got here, and it is not within our power to do anything about it. God knew that we would be in this hopeless and helpless situation, and at the appointed time, at the intersection of times in human history, at the pinnacle of human history, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to resolve that unsolvable problem. It was a problem that was created long before our time, and in this day and age it is a problem that has been solved long before our time.

The work of Jesus Christ stands accomplished, and Jesus Christ came to proclaim that because of the work that He would do, the Kingdom of God was at hand. So it's helpful to understand what exactly is the Kingdom of God. These people in Jerusalem and Judea had gone and they had heard John the Baptist, this wild-haired man out there talking about the Kingdom of God approaching.

Jesus came and said, repent and believe the good news. The Kingdom of God is at hand. And people said, okay, we thought we were living in the Kingdom of God.

We're Israelites, we've got the Law and the Prophets, we've been slaying these animals and we've undergone discipline from God, from disobedience, we've been His people, we've borne the testimony that God is active in human history for these fourteen or fifteen hundred years. Why are you coming and telling us about this Kingdom of God business? What is it new that we don't already know from our Bible here, our Old Testament Scriptures? So Jesus began to teach what the Kingdom of God was, and we've seen in our previous study here in chapter four, this is really the first extended teaching section that Mark has included in his Gospel. He has said several

times, Jesus sat down and taught the multitudes, but He hasn't told us what He said.

Now in chapter four, He has started to give us some of the content of Jesus' message. And so, as He tries to get across what the Kingdom of God is, He has chosen to use comparisons or parables. Whenever there's a difficult concept to try to express, if it's something that people have never seen before and haven't had any frame of reference to understand, we try to find something they do understand and make a comparison, don't we? We do this in instructing those of you that have been teachers or have been in a position to teach.

When you're trying to get across an abstract concept or something that's extremely unfamiliar, we say, well, it's like this. And we bring it into the realm of the familiar and the things that are known. That's what Jesus is doing with these parables.

He's not trying to wrap the truth of God in some kind of an inscrutable wrapping that people can't understand it unless they have some special insight. He's trying to make a comparison to explain it and to get it across. And we've seen that in this chapter, He's using three comparisons that are all agricultural.

Why did He use agriculture instead of seamanship? Or He could have used nautical comparisons and talked about ships and rigging. Or He could have used wild animals. He could have used many different things.

But why does He pick agriculture? He talks about the kingdom of God in terms of a seed and a field and someone who sows a crop and reaps a crop. This is the kind of economy that they had in that day, isn't it? That was the main source of income. Most people had fields.

They sowed their own grain. They reaped their own crops. They gathered the wheat into their barns.

They took it out and ground it, separated the wheat from the chaff, made flour and made their bread. And this was a very common sight in Israel. So this is something familiar.

This is something concrete that Jesus can use to get across these concepts that are a little bit more difficult to understand because they're a part of the invisible world. They're a part of that spiritual reality that pertains to God Himself. We can't see God.

Our human race got messed up thousands of years ago. We're not qualified to stand in the presence of God. Even a vision of God caused the Old Testament prophets to fall on their face and say, I'm sinful.

Lord, leave me. I don't want to disintegrate in Your presence. And holy God is invisible to us.

And so we have to learn about Him through an intermediate agency. And we have that in God's Word. So Jesus Christ is getting across to the people of His day the truth about God, that

invisible truth about God and the coming in of this new way of thinking, this new way of living.

Something is going to change about the plan of God and about God's requirements for people. We're going to switch over from that system that John the Baptist represented. What did John do? He did a ritual.

He took people and dunked them under the Jordan and brought them back up. That's a ritual. It doesn't do anything more than perhaps wash off a little of the old dirt and deposit a little bit of the dirt that's in that muddy Jordan River.

It doesn't change the heart. It doesn't change the mind. It doesn't transform us on the inside.

It doesn't eradicate our sin to get dunked under the water. It's symbolic. It represents something in the immaterial world, something in the invisible world.

That was the ministry of the Old Testament. These animal sacrifices, these rituals and requirements for Israel, they were concrete things that were designed to teach the invisible spiritual truth about God. He's real.

He made us. He has a purpose for our existence as a human race. He has a purpose for each of us as individuals.

How can we come to understand what that is? He's a part of a world that we can't perceive. God has an intermediate means of communication. He uses these rituals in the Old Testament.

Today, he uses the truth that's in his word. And that's how we find out about these things that we're not qualified to perceive and that we are not able to comprehend. That's what Jesus is doing here.

So he uses these parables or these comparisons and they're agricultural. They're something people can identify with and understand. And there are three emphases, there are three points that Jesus is getting across in these three seed parables in chapter 4. This first story talked about a sower who goes forth and sows this seed.

He goes out into the field and he's broadcasting this seed with his hand. These men back in that day would get a big bag of seed and hang it on their hip and it would be open at the top. And they would go forth into this area that belonged to them, their field.

And they would reach their hand in and they would broadcast this seed and scatter it out into the soil so that it could fall into the cracks and the furrows and take root and grow and produce a crop. So this sower goes forth to sow and he's scattering this seed. But the emphasis in that first story is on what the soil is like.

What's going to happen to the seed when it hits these different kinds of soil? And Jesus says

there are how many different kinds of soil, do you remember? Oh, we've got two answers. Remember we had the hard-packed soil, this is the hard ground that's by the wayside where people have been walking, camels and donkeys and road carts and so forth. It's hard-packed, what happens to the seed when it hits that? It lays right on the top and sooner or later some birds are going to fly by, pick it up and carry it off.

It doesn't last, it doesn't remain, it doesn't fulfill its purpose of producing a crop, it gets carried away. So that's type number one, the hard-packed soil. Type number two was the stony soil.

There's some dirt there, there's some loose earth, but it's rocky. Just beneath the surface you've got these stones. The seed falls there and it can't sink very far in.

It tries to establish a root system, it hits these rocks and it can't establish much of a foundation. And when the sun rises, these shallow roots overheat, the moisture is not there and it withers. And you ultimately wind up with a dead plant and with no production.

So that was type number two, the stony soil. Type number three was the soil where the seed fell into it and it was good ground. It was able to sink in and establish its root system and produce the stalk and the ear.

But just about the time that it was getting ready to produce fruit, this soil also supported other kinds of seeds, thorn bushes and thistles, and non-productive, non-crop-producing vegetation. And this stuff grew up along with the plants that resulted from the seed. And so it chokes out the crop and it can't get enough sunlight, it can't get enough nourishment from the soil to produce fruit.

And so it also winds up being unproductive. Even though it was received, even though it was taken in, it wasn't able to ultimately accomplish its purpose. So those were the first three kinds of soil.

And then Jesus turned around and he said, now there's another category. There are three good types of soil. There's some soil where the seed falls in and that soil doesn't tolerate the thorns and the thistles.

It's not full of rocks, it's not hard-packed. And when the seed hits that soil and sinks in deep and establishes its root and produces plants, it produces a crop, some 30-fold, some 60-fold, and some 100-fold. That 100-fold ground is so rich and so fertile and has such good irrigation that one seed will produce a plant that has 100 new seeds on it.

It produces, it accomplishes its purpose. So we have the three bad types of soil, the three good types of soil, and the emphasis in that story. Why did Jesus tell this story and say the Kingdom of God is like this? We can understand the concrete portion of it fairly easily, but it isn't a gardening lesson, is it? It's not a manual for crop production.

Jesus has a deeper point to make. He's trying to get across something from the invisible realm. And what is he saying? He's saying the result in our life depends on how receptive we are to the seed.

The seed has its own programming information in it, in that genetic code, in that DNA, in those little spiral molecules. It's all the information to produce the plant, the roots, the leaves, the stalk, the buds, and the full head of grain. The soil has to do no work to produce that crop.

All it has to do is receive and nurture the seed. And that's the way our lives are. As people in general, that seed is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And what's the first thing that has to take place? We don't have to work our way to God. We don't have to change our habits. We don't have to suddenly become great moral paragons and somehow try to show God that we really are worth saving.

All we have to do is receive the seed that has the life, the seed that has its own information, that if it's received and nurtured, will grow and sprout. And so the principle is that it depends on how receptive we are. That's all we have to do.

That's all that the gospel requires, is simply receiving the good news that God has solved our problem. But He has conditioned it on one thing. We have to want it.

We have to be willing, humble enough, to recognize that we can't solve our problem. We can't establish a relationship with God based on anything that we do, on anything that we give, on any good deeds or on anything else. We have no righteousness.

We have no standing before the Lord. But Jesus Christ does. And we can appropriate what He has done on the cross for ourselves.

And because of that, by receiving that and doing nothing more than accepting it, it can bear fruit and it can establish life and production in our own life. So Jesus' first emphasis in that first story is on the idea of receiving. How receptive are we? Are we the hard-packed ground and we say, I don't need it, I don't want it, I'm doing it for a different purpose, I want to be a road, I don't want to be a field.

Or I've got these rocks, I've got these things I'm not willing to give up, I've got these things that are going to obstruct and interfere with what God wants to do in my soul. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know that this principle continues. In our previous study in the book of Colossians, Paul told that church, he said, look, the same way that you receive Jesus Christ, that's how you're supposed to live.

How did we receive Jesus Christ? By faith. God does the work. God saves us.

We make no contribution. All we do is have the willingness to accept His work. And it's the same

way in the Christian life.

Paul said, as you have believed, as you have received Him, so walk, so live. And in some cases, we have made Christianity, we have made the Gospel unattractive because we focus on the material, we focus on what we can see. And we know that the results of a healthy Christian life will be expressions of ministry, expressions of morality, expressions of goodness.

And because that's in the seen realm, because that's what we know and what we can identify, we tend to create the Christian life in the seen world. And we say, well, if you're going to be a Christian, you've got to quit all your bad habits. You've got to become moral.

You've got to start doing good deeds. You better show up at church every time the door is open. And we keep wanting to quantify it in terms of the seen and what we can perceive.

We have to remember what Jesus Christ is getting across here. It's the unseen world. It's the work of God.

It's the power of God that constitutes the Christian life. Now, it will have its own effect. It will have its result.

If God's power gets inside us, it's going to change us. It will transform our thinking. It will transform our priorities.

And in a natural and healthy and self-motivated way, we will produce results in this seen world. But we can't jump the gun and skip the invisible transformation step and just start trying in our own energy to produce these good things. They have to be a result of something that's in the unseen realm, something that's the result of the power of God, the work of God inside us.

That's why Paul says in another place, it's God that is at work inside you to will and to do His good pleasure. We have to receive the power of God and let God transform us. It's not hard work to do those things that please God.

When God has transformed us and made them attractive and made them something that we say, I can do that, here's an opportunity, here's a chance to reflect what I know about God. Here's a chance to contribute to a ministry or here's a chance to share the good news of the gospel with a person that seems to be looking. It's a natural, healthy growth process.

How much work does the ground have to do in order to nurture the soil, to nurture the seed, to be nurturing soil? It doesn't have to work at all. If it's simply willing to receive the seed, the seed does the work. The seed has the information.

The seed knows what kind of plant it's going to be. Not everybody is going to produce corn. Some people are going to produce wheat.

Some people are going to produce barley. And it's kind of silly for us to look in our life and say, well, I'm producing corn. I think everybody ought to be producing corn.

And to look across the fence at the wheat field or the barley field and say, how come you're not popping out some big ears of corn here? I can clearly see that that's what ought to be happening. And we function back over here in the seen world. And we start getting our eyes on each other and saying, well, that person's just not very productive.

I bet he's got rocks in his soil. I bet he's probably hard-packed. And that's his problem.

Instead of concentrating on what God is doing inside us, watching for our own opportunities, the work that God can do inside us. And it's natural and it's healthy. And it leaves us with a feeling of love and joy and peace and patience and all of those other fruits of the Spirit that are recorded in Galatians 5, 22 and 23.

But we have to let God do the work. If we get in there and say, step aside, God, I've got this figured out. I know where the ministry is.

I know what the opportunity is. I know what needs to happen. I can see what's going on.

It's in my visible world. And I'm going to seize it and I'm going to do it. And we get away from the source.

It's the same thing as what happens on the reverse side. Remember when Jesus said, what you think in your heart is what you are. If you look at a woman to lust after her in your heart, you've already committed adultery because it takes place on the inside.

That's what God is looking at. That's why the Word of God is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It doesn't say the Word of God is a critic of the thoughts and intents or the actions and the deeds of a person.

It doesn't say Scripture will judge your deeds and your actions. It says Scripture will judge your heart because anybody can produce a deed. Anybody can lay a check in the plate.

Anybody can go make a visit. Anybody can hustle and work and produce. Cults that are founded on some moral principle.

They want to do good. People that are willing to accept any sort of a philosophy. They just want to get out and be philanthropic.

They want to be altruistic. They want to go out and do good deeds and be charitable. We look at that and we say, well, how can there possibly be anything wrong with charity? There can be something wrong with charity.

There can be something wrong with good deeds because God is not looking at the deed. He's looking at what is behind it. What if Al Capone was a charitable man? Al Capone donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to charity in Chicago.

Do you think that there are marks on the credit side of the ledger for Al Capone? I think probably not. Why is that? He did good deeds. There were thousands of orphans and widows that benefited from his actions.

Why do you think there will be no credit for Al Capone? A, he wasn't a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and B, his motivation for doing those deeds was faulty to be charitable. He was trying to put up a front. He was trying to convince people to allow him to stay in that city and continue to do his illegal activities, to murder and to take advantage and to flout the laws of this country.

And we don't know what's behind good deeds. We operate in the visible world. All we can see is the result.

We can't see into the heart. But God can and that's where God does His work. That's where God does His evaluation and that's where we need to change.

We need it first of all at the point of salvation. The cleansing and the establishing of a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. That's the first step.

And God does all the work. We don't have to change. We don't have to become something that we don't feel like being.

We don't have to put on a facade. We don't have to become hypocrites, smiling and acting and doing things that we have no motivation to do. Salvation is a work of God.

And Paul says, as you receive Christ, so live. It's the same principle. It's the transforming work of God in the invisible realm that will naturally and joyfully and hopefully and in a loving fashion produce these results that are beneficial and are valuable, not just for their own sake, not just because they do some good in the visible world, but because they reflect the transforming power of God.

They're reflections of His grace, His power, His glory, and that's why He approves them and that's why He accepts them because they manifest that Jesus Christ's work on the cross was not in vain. That's what Jesus is trying to get across here in these stories. He's saying, look, I'm going to tell you a story.

It's called a parable. It's going to give you some things in the visible realm, but He wants us to look past that story and see what the principle is. What is the truth behind it? This isn't a lesson in agriculture.

It's a lesson in life. It's a lesson in the power of God. So, that first story focuses on the idea of

receiving.

It is up to us. God has created us with free will and He doesn't tamper with it. He doesn't get in and tweak our decision maker.

It's our choice. And God, you know, all of us who have children at certain points in their life, there's a stage where we say, I have trained you. I've taught you the rules.

I've told you what life is like. And at a certain point, we have to take our hands off and let our children function independently and use their little decision makers. And we can see ahead of time that they make a decision and they're going to run their head right into a brick wall.

We know it's going to happen. It's going to be painful. But we have to let them do it because we have to let them understand that we can't make their decisions for them.

We can't live their life for them. They have to make their own choices and their own decisions. And even when we know it's going to harm them, we let them do it.

Our Heavenly Father is the same way. And when we choose to do other than His will, He will let us. And we will hit our heads on that brick wall.

We choose. We decide. That's the focus of that first story.

Then Jesus remarks in verse 21 of chapter 4. He's basically saying to the crowd, I am not trying to hide the truth from you. I haven't brought the light of the truth here to Israel and put it under a bushel basket. I haven't put it under the bed.

I'm trying to put it up on the lampstand to illuminate, to teach you what the truth is in the invisible realm. That's why I'm here. I'm not here to be mysterious and be enigmatic.

I'm here to show you the truth. But that light up on the lampstand shows two different kinds of truth. It will either illuminate the truth of God and show what He is like and what He can do, or it will shine and reflect on those who are hard of heart, who are hard of hearing, who don't want to find out about God, who don't care that God has solved that greatest problem and that God has a purpose and a plan in their life, and that the same circumstances that we encounter as believers can work together for good and can reflect God's glory and give our lives meaning and purpose and definition.

There are people who don't want that. They say, well, even if there is a God, I really wish He'd just kind of stay out of my business and stay out of my way. I've got an agenda here that I would like to accomplish.

Jesus says when He puts that light up on the lampstand, it's either going to illuminate God or it's going to illuminate hardness of heart. And that's what He says in this section. There is nothing

hidden which will not be revealed.

There is nothing that has been kept secret, but that it will come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. That's the invitation.

How many of us have ears to hear? Virtually all of us. With rare exceptions, we can all perceive. We can all hear the truth.

It's our choice. Are we going to be there when the seed is scattered? Are we going to receive it? Are we going to think about it and say, if this is true, then how should I live? That's our calling as believers to let God change us, to let God shift our priorities, to let God give us a new perspective on life. Whoever has, to him, more will be given.

Whoever does not have even what he has will be taken away. That's verse 25. And it tells us that there's a limit.

We've seen this week in the lives of people that we don't know what our span of opportunity is in this life. We can think that we are living an ordinary life with no danger, with no opportunity for disaster, and yet the unexpected can strike and our short span on this earth can be over. What did we do with our time? What was the end result of our life? What did we accomplish or what was accomplished in us during our short stay here? God gives us the opportunity.

If we have ears to hear, we can hear. God can do a work inside us. God can change us.

God can make us productive. God can plant that seed and produce a crop. It's up to us.

And if we pursue that and we have that seed within us, more will be given. It will produce and there will be more seed which will be planted and our lives will reflect God's glory. But if we do not have, if we're like that hard-packed soil, if we're like the soil that only tolerates it a little bit and then lets it die, even what we have will be taken away.

There's a decision point and God calls us to account. That free will that we have comes with responsibility, with freedom comes responsibility. It's a principle of life.

God has given us the freedom to choose, but we're responsible for how we choose and we will be held to account as believers and as human beings. That great white throne of judgment at the end of human history will evaluate and God is going to say, okay, next come up here and show me what you've got. Show me the righteousness that qualifies you for eternal life.

And if we do not have the righteousness of Jesus Christ that He purchased with His own blood on the cross for us, it doesn't matter how many good deeds, it doesn't matter how moral we were, what a nice person we were. Nothing can stack up to the righteousness of Jesus Christ and that's God's minimum requirement. And without that, we will spend eternity in the lake of fire with Satan and his angels.

Whoever has to Him, more will be given. Whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away. Then we have that second story that he tells regarding seed.

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 the crop by itself, the blade, the head, and after that, the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately the man comes back and puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. Jesus shifts the pieces of this story a little bit and now we as people, we're that person that's been given the seed.

And it's the seed that has the power. It's the seed that is sown. It's the seed that produces a crop.

The man who sows it, he doesn't get out there and pump a handle or turn a crank or something that causes that plant to grow. He doesn't sit there and knead it like he would bread dough or something. He plants the seed and he lets the seed and the soil do their work.

The provision for producing a crop is inherent in the materials, particularly that seed that has the life in it. When we go out here and plant these huge fields of wheat and so forth, we're relying on what God has done. God designed the plants.

They've been perpetuating themselves generation after generation for thousands of years. Science has yet to produce the first seed, the first man-made seed. Science can't produce it.

We know how it works, but we can't do it. We can't instill that principle of life. Even when we take materials and we sort of synthesize life, it can't reproduce.

It can't sustain itself. Science will never be able to do that because that's a work of God and the same is true in the spiritual life. We can't synthesize good for God.

It has to be God's good that is done within us because we have received His grace. And now this third story that we look at this morning in verses 30 through 32, Jesus is searching for a comparison. How can I get across this reality to you? How can I tell you what this individual invisible world is like? He says, What shall we liken the kingdom of God to? What parable shall we use to picture it? How can I give you something in the concrete world to help you see this invisible reality? He says.

It's like a mustard seed, which when it is sown on the ground is smaller than all the seeds in the earth. But when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all the herbs and shoots out large branches so that the birds of the air can come and nest in its shade. And once again, the pieces of this story have shifted a little bit in terms of their symbolic value.

It's still agricultural. The power is still in the seed. But what happens? In the first story, we saw the emphasis on responsibility to receive what God is willing to do.

In the second story, we saw that it's God's work in the process. The process takes place through the power of God. And now we're looking at it in terms of result.

What is the result of that seed being planted? The tiniest seed. Have you seen a mustard seed? Sometimes you can get that mustard at the spice rack. Those little infinitesimally small seeds that come in that spice.

You can plant one of those and it produces this large piece of vegetation that's large enough to cast shade and for birds to be underneath. Where did that information come from? The design of the leaves and the stalks and the reproduction. All of that information is in that almost microscopic package.

What is the result if it is sown? Notice it says that two times here. It says it in verse 31. It says the mustard seed, which when it is sown on the ground, is smaller.

But when it is sown, it grows up. Jesus doesn't repeat himself for no reason. And he says two times, this seed has to be sown.

I can keep a box of that mustard spice up on my shelf for a hundred years and there's not going to be a plant. There's not going to be any shade. There's not going to be any birds getting benefit from it, is there? That seed has to be sown.

And this is the third point that Jesus is making. If we want to have that process begin like it does when we receive the seed. If we want that process to continue like it does when the man sows the seed and he goes away and it grows, he knows not how.

And if we want that process to produce results, it starts with the sowing of the seed. We have to be there when the seed is sown. We have to accept the seed and recognize its value.

Nobody gets a huge crop of wheat or a huge crop of mustard plants by accident. They plow the ground. They obtain the seed.

They weed it. They water it. They nurture it.

They make sure that that seed has an environment in which it can flourish. But it's the seed that does the work and it's the seed that produces the result. So in these three stories, Jesus is taking these comparisons in the visible earthly realm and he's getting across a very simple truth.

God is waiting in heaven. God is tapping His foot, anxious to save us and to give our lives meaning and purpose. He wants to make it the most productive to count for.

And once we make that choice, it's God's work. God put the life in the seed. God designed it to sink in roots and find the water and find the sunshine.

God superintends the process and God produces the results. We don't have to work at being motivated. We don't have to try to motivate others by pressure or by browbeating or by trying to make people feel guilty or some other form of human pressure to try to get people to do the right thing in the visible realm.

What we need to do is be faithful to express the truth. The truth of God's plan and the truth of God's character is that seed. And people have to receive it on their own.

We can't go out there and posthole and plant seed in someone else's field. We have our individual responsibility to receive it. Let's close now in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You once again for the privilege we have to assemble here in freedom and in safety. We thank You that we are alive and continuing forward in this life, which means that You still have a plan. You still have a purpose for our lives.

Whatever we have done up to this point, we know that we have the time ahead of us remaining to think about the truth of Your Word, to think about the truth of Your plan and Your purpose. We have the opportunity to be receptive soil, to accept and receive the life that is contained in the work of Jesus Christ. We know that You can make a difference in our thinking.

You can shift our priorities. You can cleanse us and transform us so that as we continue to go forward in our daily lives, whether we are in a time of prosperity and peace and safety, or whether we are going through a great crisis and trial, it isn't a happenstance. It isn't just a random occurrence.

We know that nothing happens in our lives as believers without Your knowledge, without Your watch care. And just as we do with our own children, You allow us to go through hard times to teach us the things that we need to know for both this life and the next. And we trust in You.

We recognize that You do not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear. You sustain us. You strengthen us.

And You cause our lives to have a purpose and to be productive in these things. And we know that the things that we see in the visible world are then reflections of what You have done inside us. We pray, Father, that if there are any here this morning that have never made that first step, have never accepted that first seed of truth, which is the good news that Jesus Christ has solved our greatest problem, which is a lack of relationship with You, that they will be encouraged to meditate on these things and to take the opportunity to accept that great and wonderful gift that we have through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

We pray that in the days ahead that those who continue to work in Oklahoma City, that those who keep watch there in Tulsa at St. Francis Hospital over little Aaron Lobaugh, and for Don Evans, and for all of the others in our immediate periphery, that Your hand will be on them, that Your

sustaining, comforting, and encouraging grace will be with them, that they will have a sense of Your presence and will recognize these principles that we have seen this morning, that there is a purpose, that You do have a plan, and that we will understand the reason for which You have let us experience these trials, whether it's in this life or in the next. We pray that in every way our lives will reflect Your grace and Your glory, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.