

95-04-30Mark

The seed parables recorded in the first part of chapter four. We've seen in great detail now the parable of the sower, the seed and the soils. We've seen the significance of that.

We've seen the second parable of the man who goes and sows the seed and goes away and sleeps. He spends his days and his nights and the seed grows. He knows not how.

And the seed, the earth from itself produces the stalk, the head and the grain in the head. And he comes back when the time is ripe and harvests the crop from that seed. We saw last week the third seed parable in this chapter.

Jesus says, to what shall we liken the kingdom of God? With what parable shall we picture it? And this is a rhetorical device that Jesus uses to heighten interest and focus attention on this comparison. He says that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which when it is sown on the ground, it's smaller than all the seeds of the earth. But when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, shoots out large branches so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.

We've seen that Jesus has emphasized three different aspects of the kingdom of God in these parables. The first parable focused on the soils. What's going to happen to the seed once it leaves the sower's hand? What kind of reception is it going to get? How much nurturing and encouragement, how much fertile soil is going to be there for that seed to take root and fulfill its purpose? The second parable, the pieces of the story change in their symbolic value a little bit.

In the first story, the sower sows the word, and we think of Jesus Christ Himself and the truth of God that He communicates to us, both in His ministry and through the inspired scriptures. In the second story, we have the sower who plants this seed, and then He goes away and He sleeps and rises and sleeps and rises. And it tells us that this is probably not a picture of Jesus Christ because the seed is growing and the person who sowed it doesn't know exactly how it happens.

And in that picture, we see ourselves and we see the opportunity that we have to take that seed to make sure that it is sown and nurtured, and although we don't contribute, we don't turn a crank or pump a handle or pedal some pedals, we don't fire up a generator, the seed has the information, the seed has the power, the seed has the life, and the seed performs the work. We are a place of nurture, we are a place of reception, we are given the choice of whether or not to accept and to nurture that seed, but the seed has the power, the seed does the work, the seed produces the fruit. And then the man who sowed that seed comes back and reaps the crop that results.

And we know that because of the work that God does in our lives, as a result of our reception of His Word, our obedience in faith, our trust, our hope in God, that God's work inside us is going to produce fruit and produce results. And we gain the benefit of that. We benefit from that in the

blessing that we receive in time, we benefit from that at the judgment seat of Christ when both gold and silver and precious stones that have been generated in our life through God's work accrue to our benefit.

It's blessing and reward in time, it's blessing and reward in eternity. Because of the work of God. We didn't earn it, we didn't deserve it, all we did was accept it.

We allow God and God's Word and God's Spirit to work inside us to will and to do His good pleasure. To renew us, to transform us by the renewing of our minds. We are passive subjects of the grace of God.

That has to take place first. After God's transformation we are fully equipped for every good work. And that of course is an ongoing process throughout our lives.

We sleep and we rise, we sleep and we rise. That seed takes hold and grows and begins producing that crop. So the first parable emphasized the responsibility to receive and to nurture the Word of God.

The second story that we've just reviewed emphasizes the fact that it's God's work, it's God's power, it's God's life. It isn't our work, it's not our idea, it isn't our design. We don't know what God's purposes are in many circumstances of our life, many occasions, many of the situations that we find ourselves.

Why is it that one spouse is taken and the other is left here in time? Why is it that disaster strikes? Why do we suffer health problems? Why do we have our children afflicted and in the hospital? Why do we have our children suffering? This is the question that everyone in Oklahoma, everyone in America has been asking themselves over the past couple of weeks. Why does God allow these things? We don't have the answers. We can't give chapter and verse and say this is God's working and this is God's dealing in the lives of these people, in these families and in these hearts.

We do know who God is. We know what God is like. We know His character.

We know His love and His mercy and His grace. And we know that whatever it is God is doing, it's good. It's not bad.

It's not evil. And that's our confidence. That's our faith and that's our hope.

It's God's work. It's God's design and it's God's plan. Any one of us in this room, if we were putting together the plan for our life, it would be far different, wouldn't it? We would leave out the physical suffering.

We would leave out the physical limitations. We would leave out the loss of loved ones. We would leave out the pain and the tragedy and the difficulty and the endurance tests that we face

for days and weeks and months and years.

We wouldn't program that in. But thanks be to God, it isn't our plan. It's God's plan and it's based on His omniscience, His all-encompassing love.

We know even in the human realm that love has to be tough. Loving parents have to discipline children. Loving parents have to deny privileges.

Loving parents have to withhold gifts and withhold blessings. And in many cases, allow our children to suffer, even if it's just the suffering of going to their room instead of playing with their friends, even if it's just the suffering of going to their room and not finishing their food, or going to their room without dessert. In the mind of a child, this is terrible tragedy.

This is terrible suffering. Their universe is bounded by life at home and loss of a privilege and loss of a blessing. The taking away of a treasured possession because it has been abused or it hasn't been properly cared for.

This is a big event in the life of a child. To us it seems small, but the principles behind it are important. And in a larger sense, our Heavenly Father does that with us.

And we sometimes ask, God, don't you care? Don't you realize the suffering I'm going through? How can you allow this child to go through this suffering? How can you allow this family? How can you allow us to go through this difficulty? We're going to see this question come up this morning. Those three seed parables have taught the principle. Now we're going to see that principle put into practice.

Our mission in life is not to design the plan. Our mission in life is not to decide what the circumstances will be. We have our desires and we have our preferences.

And God in His grace often grants our desires and grants our requests. But there are other times that He does not. We can pray for week after week and month after month and we don't see a resolution of that situation for which we pray.

But the point is not the circumstance. The point is not whether or not the problem is solved. The point in many of these cases is the fact that we continue to go to our Heavenly Father in faith.

We continue to pray and we continue to talk with Him and to recognize His authority in that situation. And the prayer in and of itself is a fruit. It reflects the glory of God.

It reflects the recognition in a human heart that God has the power. God has the plan. God has the design.

We shouldn't lose heart. We shouldn't be frustrated in our prayers. The very act of praying that prayer is a fruit.

It reflects the glory of God. It recognizes His sovereignty. It recognizes His love.

And it recognizes that we understand who is guiding the course of history and who is guiding the course of our lives. We may pray for years for a particular situation and God may never resolve it in this life. It doesn't mean that the prayer was futile.

It doesn't mean that God didn't hear or that God didn't answer. It means that God chose in that circumstance to have the fruit be born through our faith and our constancy and our willingness to continue to trust Him and to continue to recognize His authority and His sovereignty in a difficult circumstance and that we don't have to have instant gratification to trust our God. It isn't like so many solutions in the world where people try something and if it doesn't work, immediately they abandon it.

How many diet plans have been tried and abandoned because the gratification didn't come? The results weren't there quick enough or easy enough to suit us and we abandoned that course. How many financial investments have been tried and then withdrawn because it didn't produce the return I was looking for? How many ventures have been started and failed because people didn't stick with it, because it didn't produce instant gratification? How many forms of entertainment in this life do people run through? How many fads have we seen over the decades come and go? Different kinds of music, different kinds of entertainment, different kinds of dances, different kinds of stars of the stage and screen to follow and to be enamored of, and yet they fade, they pass, they change with the turning of the seasons. Why? Because we're always looking for that instant gratification and very often these things don't provide it and we abandon them.

But that's not our God and that's not our calling as believers. We recognize by our persistence in prayer, by our persistence in faith, and our persistence in hope, and our persistence in love, that we don't need instant gratification from God to maintain our faith. Our faith is maintained by who and what God is.

Our faith is maintained by God's character and God's manifest love and His manifest grace. We don't have to see answers to trust our God. We don't say, well, I prayed and it didn't work, I'm going to abandon that God and find some other religion, some other faith, because we know our God and we know who He is.

That's the message in these seed parables. What is our reception going to be of the seed of God's truth and God's word? Of the truth of who God is and what He's like? Are we going to accept that, embrace it, and allow it to change us on the inside? If we do, our lives, whatever course they take, whatever disasters we face, whatever prayers we have that are answered or unanswered, will be based on the power of God. It's God that is at work in us to will and to do, not our good pleasure, His good pleasure, His plan, His purpose, His glory is on the line.

That's what these parables teach. The disciples have just heard this. All day long, Jesus has been presenting this truth from different angles, different perspectives, different comparisons.

And now that same day, in verse 35, why does He bother to tell us that it's the same day? It's interesting when you look at the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke, this set of seed parables do not immediately precede this in the other accounts. And so, those other accounts don't mention that it was this same day. This information is organized in a different manner, but Mark's purpose here is clear.

He is tying what is about to happen to the teaching that Jesus has just done. This next episode, when the disciples and the Lord get into the boat and go across the lake and encounter this storm, is the same day that Jesus has been teaching these truths. And that means something.

It means, pay attention. The teaching that you have just heard, the principles that you have just seen are going to get their test and their applicational support in what's just about to happen. On that same day, evening had come.

Jesus says to them, let's cross over to the other side. Now, let's think about this. It's a simple statement.

Let's cross over to the other side. Anyone can say that. Many ferry boat operators have said this.

Many boat owners have said this. Let's get in the boat and go to the other side. It isn't the words themselves that are significant here.

It's who's saying them. Who utters these words? This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of glory. If He says, let's go over to the other side, that's significant.

More so than anybody else. Does He say, let's go halfway and sink? Does He say, let's get out in the water and be drowned? Let's get out in the water and be swamped and never make it to the other side? He doesn't say that. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with authority over demons, with authority over disease, with authority over His own destiny, says, let us cross over to the other side.

That is a statement that a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be able to take to the bank. Jesus says we're going to the other side. Puts us in mind of the Israelites back in Egypt.

Moses comes. The plagues happen. Moses proclaims the word of the Lord.

I will take you to a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. What happens? After the Red Sea incident, they get to the other side, start running low on food, start running low on water. Why have you brought us out here simply to die in the wilderness? We would have been better off to stay in Egypt.

Why have you brought us out here to die? They didn't think about the word of the Lord. What did God say? He didn't say, let me take you out of Egypt and deliver you from bondage so that you can die of starvation in the desert. He said, I'm going to take you to a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

That's the word of the Lord. Believers can take that to the bank. They can trust it.

They can rely on it. They can allay fear by trusting in what God has said. This simple statement, let us cross over to the other side, can be the object of faith for Jesus' disciples.

When they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat, just as He was. Other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose.

The word here used for windstorm is the same word that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Bible that the disciples had, this is the word for the storm in Jonah 1, when the sailors toss Him overboard and He is swallowed by the great fish. This is a tempest. Over in Jonah, it says that God hurled a spirit into the waters and this great tempest arose.

It has the idea of great violence. You can read some of the commentaries and Bible dictionaries, people that are familiar with the Sea of Galilee, and they'll tell you about the geography, how on the east shore these steep cliffs rise up. Not far away you have Mount Hermon and the cold air that rushes down from that height hits the warm air that hovers over this sea and creates great cataclysmic storms.

The sea can be very calm one moment and be whipped into a froth the next. And the Sea of Galilee is famous for these violent storms. One of these occurs here.

Not by accident, but by design. The waves beat into the boat so that it was filling. But He, Jesus, was in the stern asleep on a pillow.

It's interesting in Greek here because the word asleep is the very last word in the sentence. And you get the picture of Jesus. Here are the disciples up in the front of the boat, green water coming over the bow.

The rigging is whipping in the wind. The sails are being pulled in. Several of the disciples are bailing and trying to get the water out of the boat.

And you look toward the stern and it says that Jesus was in the stern on a cushion asleep. And as the camera pans from the front portion of the boat back to the stern, here is the Lord evidently oblivious to the danger, oblivious to the storm, oblivious to the noise and the cries as the disciples tell each other, grab that line, scoop out that water, secure that piece of gear there on the boat. We've got to save ourselves.

And they're working frantically. And we look back in the back of the boat and Jesus Christ is

asleep with His head on this leather cushion that was there for the man who operated the rudder. The only cushion in the whole boat.

Not probably very comfortable. But He's asleep. He's exhausted from a day of teaching.

So they awoke Him and they said to Him, Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing? The other accounts talk about the disciples crying out, we are perishing, we are perishing. Teacher, Lord, do You not care that we are perishing? Do You not care about our distress? Do You not care about this cataclysm that has befallen us? And we've heard this question asked so many times over the past few weeks. We've heard it all through our lives when disasters have struck.

Doesn't the Lord care? Isn't He aware of the difficulty here? Doesn't He understand the danger? Doesn't He hear when we call? Are we having to wake Him up? Has He fallen asleep? There's a great passage in the Old Testament where it talks about Israel under discipline from God believing that God has fallen asleep. And the prophet Isaiah reassures them and said, the Lord is not asleep. The Lord is fully aware of what you're going through and it fulfills His purpose.

Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing? Then He arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. Now, when we think about this story, the prominent feature of it is Jesus' authority.

That was what stuck in the minds of the disciples. Jesus spoke and it didn't take five minutes or ten minutes or fifteen minutes like it would in normal circumstances. When He rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea and said, Be still, the water calmed instantly.

Instantly. It wasn't a process. It wasn't gradual.

It was instantly calm. It was instantly no wind, no waves. And He said to them, Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? How is it that you have no faith? The real issue in this story, we think about Jesus' authority and His power over the wind and over the wave, but the point of the story goes back to those three preceding parables, the principles that Jesus was trying to get across, the things that He explained in detail to His disciples.

What did He tell them? After teaching these parables, You are here to have faith in God. That's your purpose. That's what He told His disciples.

You're here to receive the seed. You're here to let God work in your soil. You're here to let God produce fruit in your life.

And that fruit is the fruit of faith. That fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. It is love.

It's joy. It's peace. That's the issue.

Why do we face these difficult circumstances? Why do we face these tests? Are we here to

simply accomplish good in the physical realm? Remember last week the great contrast between the material and the immaterial, between what is seen and what is not seen? Jesus is trying to get us past the visible world, past the immediate gratification and the immediate result, past our limited desire for earthly results, earthly comfort, earthly good. The issue is an invisible issue. Jesus said, when I put this lamp up on the lampstand, it's going to reveal the hidden things, the things that are unseen, the things that you can't measure, that you can't quantify, that you can't describe in many cases to another person, because it happens on the inside.

It happens in the invisible spiritual world in which our souls exist. There is no problem here with wind and wave. Jesus Christ has authority over those things, just as He has authority over the demons, authority over disease, authority over His own destiny.

Jesus has established that in the preceding episodes in Mark. The issue here is what's going on in the minds of the disciples. God has created this situation.

It wasn't a happenstance. Satan didn't come and whip up the waves in the water. This is an occasion that God allowed, that God has created.

It is a test. When I was a midshipman at the Naval Academy, they were trying to teach us navigation, all different kinds of navigation. Can you look up and locate yourself by looking at the stars? Can you determine direction? Can you figure out your course through the water? Can you take into account the currents and the tides and all of the other factors that affect the movement of a ship over water? They would teach us the principles of drift, of tides, of currents, of nautical charts, of weather information, and how to take these into account to compute one's course and one's progress through the water.

After they would teach us these things and explain how this information was derived and what the practical application of it was, we had a thing called a practical exercise. We would get a giant chart of the Chesapeake Bay or the Indian Ocean or some other body of water and we would be given information. These are your winds.

This is the time of day. This is the time of year. This is the ship and the speed that you're trying to make and this is the course that you're trying to set.

Now you compute your progress. Use these principles that we have taught you and you locate yourself on the chart. This was all in the classroom.

Theory, practice, theory, practice. But then there came a day when we had a cruise down to Chesapeake Bay and we had these yard patrol craft which are small versions of a destroyer. They have some 18 or 20 of these craft and there would be a crew of 8 to 10 midshipmen on each one.

Yours truly was designated to be the navigator for this trip down from Annapolis through the

Chesapeake Bay, the Severn River mouth there, all the way down to Little Creek, Virginia. Suddenly now, all of this theory, all of this nice talk about tides and currents and so forth becomes very real and very immediate because this is an international shipping lane. There are oil tankers.

There are cruisers and yachts and shipping traffic of every description and we are pulling out onto this great nautical highway and it's all up to me. If I don't properly analyze the fixes that are taken as they determine direction to various landmarks, we can run aground. We can wreck the ship.

We can run into someone else. That was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life because I found how important it is to pay attention when the principles are taught because you never know when you will be called upon to depend on those things for your very life and your very existence. The same is true in dozens of other circumstances of life and the same is true in our spiritual life.

Jesus Christ has taught the principles. The classroom instruction is complete and this is the practical exercise. Like our little yard patrol craft, here are the disciples and their boat out on the water and they are getting a literal test of faith.

Where is the seed in your soul? Where is that seed of truth? Where is that recognition of God's control and God's place in the universe? It's a nice academic proposition. It's a nice theoretical statement to make, but does it make a difference? These men are fishermen. They know the sea.

They know boats. They have plenty of resources at their command and yet they hit a tempest where they believe that they are going to perish. They've seen enough of the Sea of Galilee.

They know this kind of storm. They have lost compatriots in previous storms who were caught out and couldn't save themselves and they fear for their lives. That's the test.

That's the point of challenge. What are you going to do with the truth that's in your soul now? Are you going to fall back on seamanship? Are you going to fall back on tugging on ropes and bailing with bales? Or are you going to look at the unseen reality, the hidden truth that surpasses all of the physical realm? That's the test. That's the challenge for the disciples here.

Jesus instantly stops the test when they fail it. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were reading along and it said, And lo, as the tempest grew mightier and as the Lord continued to sleep, behold, Peter saith to John, let us pray. Let us trust in our God.

Did the Lord not say, let us cross to the other side? Let us have faith, brother. Tighten that rope and let's wait for the deliverance of God. I've puzzled over why it is that so many of our examples from the disciples are negative.

Not very often do we see that kind of a positive circumstance where the disciples really took what Jesus said and put it into practice. There are a few, but not many. But think about it.

In all of our different areas of life and of instruction and so forth, it isn't the wonderful crime scene work that the police department did that resulted in a clean arrest and a clean trial and a clean conviction. It's that case where they messed it up. Where they got the evidence confused or where they failed to properly get the search warrants and to follow the book.

It's that one case that will be taught at all of the police academies. And they will say, look what happens when you get sloppy. Look what happens when you forget what you were taught in the classroom when you go out in the field.

This case was lost and this criminal was set free because someone failed to put into practice what they had been taught. They don't often go around and say, look at these 99 cases where it worked. Because you assume that in the classroom.

It sticks in our mind when we see the cases where someone failed to use it. Where the result was a disaster. The result was a failure.

The result was loss of opportunity. And that's what happens here. It sticks in our mind that the disciples panic.

That the disciples are fearful. And it sticks in our mind that their first thought is God doesn't care. God must be busy elsewhere.

He's not paying attention. We're about to perish. And here's Jesus in the back of the boat asleep.

He doesn't care. He does care. That's why they have this storm.

That's why they're on the boat in the middle of the lake at this time. It fulfills the purpose of God not only in their lives to reinforce and to try to get them to recall the principles that they've been taught. But look at the 2,000 years of teaching and the 2,000 years of benefit that came from this episode on the lake.

Does God care that they are perishing? Of course. It's central to His plan. It's going to be a part of inspired Scripture.

Do they know that at the time? Of course not. Do they think back that this might be an opportunity for them to produce fruit as a result of nurturing that seed of truth and making it the object of faith? It doesn't. They panic.

Any unbelieving sailors could have had this response. The sailors in Jonah's ship looked around for a solution. What can we throw overboard? What can we get rid of? Let's pray to our gods.

Even Jonah's sailors fought long enough to pray. The disciples here don't even do that. It's an example of failure.

But it reminds us and reinforces the point that was made in Jesus' teaching. We are responsible to receive the truth. We are responsible to make it the object of our faith when it counts.

And it counts in crisis. It counts when the chips are down. It counts when our instincts tell us to panic.

Our instincts tell us to fall apart. Our instincts tell us we've got to get busy and do something. Let's get more people in the boat to bail.

Let's tighten something else down. Let's find an answer. Let's do something.

And in many cases, it's the time to do nothing. It's the time to think about God and think about His plan and trust Him. Pray to Him in faith.

Don't worry about how soon the answer comes or if it comes. The test is, are we faithful? Do we believe God? Do we trust Him? Are we confident that His purposes are being fulfilled whatever He decides to do in circumstances? That's the great leap that He wants us to make. That's the great challenge that we face as believers.

And that is the field in which our fruit is born. I'm going to do something I don't normally do and I'm going to mention a group I made. I'm going to talk about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is a cult that exists in the United States.

There are millions of people who are members of that cult. The Mormons maintain a rotating group of some 37,000 domestic missionaries who serve a period of time from a year to two years. The average is a year and a half in which they do neighborhood evangelism.

That's why their church is large. That's why it's well-known. That's why almost every town of any size in the United States has a Mormon group and has a building and has an active group.

The Mormons are very moral. The Mormons do a lot of charitable work. The Mormons accomplish a lot in the physical world that we would call good.

And it's something to think about because it's visible. It's moral. It is perceived as good.

It's charity. And we say, how could that possibly be wrong? We can say it's wrong based on the Word of God. We can say it's wrong because it's the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Whose glory is being reflected? Whose plan is being forwarded in those efforts? It's not the plan of God. It's not the glory of God. It is human in its origin.

It's human in its energy source. It's human in its results. And it's visible.

And it's big. And there are a lot of people. But it's not accomplishing God's purpose because God's purpose is in the invisible world.

The fruit of the Spirit is not tangible, is it? Think about that list in Galatians 5. How many of those things are something you can measure with a measuring stick or quantify with a liquid measure or a dry measure? You can't count it. You can't record it in a book. You can't look around always and see it.

We know that it's present by its results in the physical realm. But the results are secondary. The results are just that.

Results. They come from that inner hidden reality that God has produced. And that's the issue.

That's the point. Now, we look at our church. Our church is not large.

Our church is not growing. Our church doesn't have three or four separate youth ministries. Our church doesn't have an active and growing young people's program.

Our church doesn't have opportunities for outreach in a lot of areas that we would love to see in the physical world. Are those things good? Of course they are. Is every church in America called to have every ministry? No, it's not.

Is every missionary currently alive called to evangelize every single person on the planet? They are not. God designates specific missionaries for specific mission fields. God designates specific churches to have specific areas of ministry.

And we can't as a hand or as an ear look at some other part of the body and say, why can't we be like that? Look at that hand and all of the good that it's doing over there and we're sitting here just being an ear. We can't do that, can we? Because we're operating in the physical realm. We're looking for physical results, measurable, tangible things that we can point to and be comforted by.

That's not the object of our faith. That's not our purpose for being here. God's glory is reflected in the invisible realm of our souls.

None of us can go and change anyone else's mind about the gospel. We can present the gospel. We can create the issue in someone's mind by the way that we live and by the words that we speak, but that is an issue between each person and the Lord.

It's the Holy Spirit working with the truth in the soul of each person. Just as we came to Christ, everyone does that. Nobody made the decision for us.

We can't make the decision for anyone else. The same is true in church. There is no way that you or I can go visit a person and create in them the decision to worship God and to learn about Him and to grow in grace and knowledge.

That is a free choice just like salvation. Can we encourage it? Can we nurture those who make that decision? Can we create the opportunity? Can we provide that environment of love that will

encourage people to do that? Yes, we can, but we can't make the decision. Any pressure that I put on someone, guilt, shame, giving with strings attached, social pressure, family pressure, God is looking at the heart.

And if that person responds and does come into our doors, in the physical realm we've succeeded in attaining our goal. We've increased the body count in the church. But in the invisible world we have failed.

We have failed because that's not the fruit of faith. It's not a response by that individual to the truth of God's Word. We can't do that for someone else.

All we can do is lift up the truth, put the lamp on the lampstand, not only in our church, but in our individual lives, and trust God to deal in the hearts of the individuals in our periphery, the individuals in our community. And if we are prepared, if we ourselves are beacons of light and love and hope and faith, God will use us and we have to trust Him for that. But there's a big difference in the physical world and the invisible world.

There's a big difference in the human efforts that people can produce out of good intentions, but looking for physical results. We look for this when we pray. We look for this when we witness.

We look for this when we evangelize. We look for this when we put ads in the paper for our church. We want to see a physical result because we operate in the physical realm.

The point of Jesus' teaching in this chapter is physical results are wonderful and that physical fruit will come, but it's a result of the seed. It comes from the seed, the design. What kind of fruit is that going to be? Wheat? Corn? Barley? Flax? What's going to grow in this field? What determines what grows in the field? It's the seed that gets sown.

Who scatters the seed? God Himself. And we can't look at ourselves and say, boy, we're bringing up nothing but flax here and look over across the fence, look at that wonderful, look at those golden ears of corn waving in the breeze. That's what we need to be.

We've got to get some corn going here. And we start turning up the soil and start trying to do things to get corn to grow in our field when God has made us a field for growing flax or for growing barley or for growing wheat. We can't evaluate in the physical realm.

There's no reason to be discouraged about our prayers. There's no reason to be discouraged about the way circumstances go if we trust our God and if we recognize the truth that Jesus is teaching here. It's God's response and it's God's responsibility to design.

It is God's prerogative to determine the type of fruit, the amount of fruit, the ways in which it comes about are all under His control and done in His power. What's our responsibility? What do these parables teach us? What does Jesus tell us in His own words? It's our responsibility to be receptive. It's our responsibility to act in faith so that when these trials come, when the testing

comes, we don't fall apart and start acting out of human instinct and human endeavors.

And we don't lose faith in our God. And we don't say, God, do you not care that our church is perishing? Do you not care that we're all getting old and we're thinning out in numbers? God, don't you care? Of course He cares. Why do you think God has brought Tahlequah Bible Church to this point in its history? Think about the disciples in the boat.

Why do you think God let that storm come? He's trying to make a point about faith and about the invisible world and the things that count. God can pop the walls of this building with people any time He wants to. God can raise up sons to Abraham out of rocks.

I think He can bring people to Tahlequah Bible Church. Why has He not done so? I don't know. What I do know is that He's a loving and merciful God.

What I do know is that He has called us not to fall apart under pressure, not to start looking for human solutions, not to start looking to human strength, but to put our faith in God. How can we possibly go wrong by trusting our God and asking Him to work inside us in the places where we do have control? Even though I'm the pastor, I can't control the size of this church. I can't control its opportunities or the number of ministries that we have, but I can control my own soul.

I can make sure that I'm receptive and that I'm looking to God in faith. I can pray even when I don't see any results from my prayers because I trust my God. I trust His promises.

I trust that seed however much there is in my soul. Each of us can do that and that's our calling. Wouldn't it be great if we found ourselves in this boat and we said, you know, God has said go to the other side.

It must be that we're going to get there. That's our calling. That's our challenge as individual believers, as members of Tahlequah Bible Church, as members of the body of Christ.

It's our opportunity for God to create that good fruit in our souls. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for the teaching that Jesus Christ has left us through the Gospel accounts.

We thank You for His example. We thank You for giving us the example of the disciples. We thank You for the challenges that You put in their path.

We thank You for recording their failures as well as their successes because it gives us a wonderful light on our own lives, our own opportunities, and our own responsibilities. Father, help us to see Your truth. Help us to be receptive to that seed that can take root in our soil and produce the stalk, the ear, and the grain.

Help us to remember, Father, that every good and perfect gift comes down from You. That it is Your church. It is Your mission field.

It's Your ministry. We are Your people. And we exist to do Your will.

Father, equip us, prepare us, give us the ability to aggressively seize and exploit those opportunities that You do provide us. And whether we are the servant with one talent or the servant with five, help us to do with those opportunities the maximum that we are capable of doing under Your enabling and Your providing. We ask all these things in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.