



Fruit Producing Faith

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Mark 4:1-20

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Chapter 4:1-20 is a full parable that is broken down like this. Verses 1 and 2 is the introduction that gives us the context. In verses 3 through about 8 you have the parable itself that is not very long. And then in verses 9 through 12, the disciples are asking Jesus about the parable. And then from verse 13 to 20, Jesus explains the parable and we're going to cover it all this morning.

4 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." ⁹ And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that

*"they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven."*

¹³ And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan

immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

(Pastor prays)

How do you know if your heart is actually right with God? It's such a subjective thing. What does it feel like? What does it actually look like if your heart is right with God? How does your life reflect it? How does something that is so personal translate into a lifestyle that is so public? As the safe middle-ground of our decaying society continues to erode, where do you find yourself? We just came off Chapter 3 and in that chapter Mark shows that Jesus was on the inside with people who were not naturally related to Him yet He called them His family when those on the outside, who were naturally related to Him, Jesus said they were not His family.

When you reach back all the way into the Bible, all the way through the books of the Old Testament, and you get to Genesis Chapter 6. There you find the destructive flood that God sent as a judgment because of the wickedness of people. He rolled across the waters and there were just a few on the inside of the Ark who were saved. That's the theme that runs through the whole Bible. It runs all the way up through the Old Testament into the Gospels and it finds itself in Mark Chapter 4. Right here, in the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Mark Chapter 4, we come to the very first real parable in this gospel. And according to what Jesus says in verse 13, this is a gateway parable. That is to say, if you don't get this one, you are not going to understand the rest of them.

So if that's the case, let's back up and talk about what is a parable. If you'd like to write things down, you might say it like this: A parable is a method of teaching that Jesus will use that typically has one point, and a parable uses

the natural world to explain the supernatural spiritual world. Even the word “parable,” it’s Greek word, *parabolas*, it means “to lay something beside another.” It means to take the natural and lay it beside the supernatural and say, “it’s like that.” You see that, it’s like that. And the parable that we have before us is a famous parable. The parable here has nothing to do with the soil and nothing to do with the seed.

The whole point of the whole story is that there is actually only one soil that produces any fruit; although if you read it, we see four different categories. You see the soil that is hard-packed on the path. You see the shallow, rocky soil. You see the thorns and you see the good soil. So although we see four different categories, there’s one that doesn’t produce fruit. It has varying degrees of failure; the hard path, the rocky soil, and the thorny soil. That’s one category. The other category is the soil that actually does produce fruit. And today, as we go through this parable that Jesus has given us, I want you to actually see which of these soils best describes you. Because what Jesus is teaching here is..

A Heart of True Faith Produces Lasting Fruit

If there is true faith, there will be lasting fruit. Let’s start slowly and get into it as we go along. Here’s the first thing I want you to see.

A fruitful heart is possible

It is possible for you to actually have a fruitful heart. Join me there on verses 1 and 2. Jesus is teaching again. He’s standing there by the sea. It’s the Sea of Galilee. So many people have gathered around in verse one that He can’t speak in such a way that they can hear. If you get out on the water, there’s a natural amphitheater, so Jesus gets in a boat in verse 1 and the boat becomes His pulpit. And there He begins to preach or teach verse one. There are so many people there. They’ve come because of His healings. They’ve come because of His miracles. Later on, He will be feeding people. People have come there, but Jesus’ primary ministry is not the miracles and the healings. His primary ministry is teaching. And in verses 3 through 8, He teaches the

parable. It's a short parable, and we'll get to it in just a little bit. But join me now in verse 9. After teaching the parable in verse nine, He quotes Jeremiah 5 and Ezekiel 12 and this is what He says. He who has ears to hear, let him hear this. Do you know what that is? That is a call for spiritual discernment. That is you praying even as you sit there today, God give me ears to hear, help me to understand the Gospel. Maybe even, God help me to receive the Gospel. You know that the teaching of Jesus is always attached to His atonement that He gives us.

When I say Gospel, this is what I mean. God is the holy Creator who created all of us in His image. You have dignity because you have been created in the image of God. But that image of God in us is disfigured by our own sin. Sin is not just that we feel lonely. Sin is the crime against God. It is something we do that is against His holy word. It's against the Bible. You don't have to live very long to know you're a sinner. That sin is not just taking you far away from God. The Bible teaches that we are dead in sin. And that is a problem that brings about the condemnation of God. It is really bad news. But the word "Gospel" means "good news." The good news is that God is also loving and kind, and He gives us Jesus; Jesus, who is fully God and fully man. He lived perfectly as a human being. That is to say, He did what you and I couldn't do, earning righteousness. He lived righteously. But that's not all He did. When He goes to the cross, that cross is there because it is an instrument of punishment, and when Jesus dies on the cross, what He does is take the punishment for us. Is God a vengeful, wrathful, judging God? Yes, but every bit of that falls on Jesus in our place. And the promise of the Gospel is this: If you will turn from your sin, the promise is you will become a child of God and your life will produce fruit. A fruitful heart is possible for you. I've prayed for you as I have gone through this passage this week as I was trying to figure out how to best explain it. I thought about the congregation and thought of the people here, some who I know will be here who are not Christians. I prayed that God would give you ears to hear. I prayed that Jesus will save you. Down in verse 10, the 12 disciples heard this and so they are asking Jesus about it, about the parable.

And look at verse 11, filled with grace. Notice what Jesus says to the disciples. He said to them, to you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God. Think of the 12. Now they're sitting there with Jesus. It's just them. They're alone with Jesus, and He tells them: you've been given that that has been so hidden for so long now. Christ is here. The mystery, the previously hidden truth of God, is found in Christ. And the grace, God has given it to that 12, who will then pass it all the way up to the modern day. Jesus says this mystery is in a parable. He's going to teach in parables. Those on the inside will get it; those on the outside, it's judgment. Notice what He says. Here's the reason Jesus taught in parables; so that they may indeed see and not perceive, they may indeed hear, and not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. And what this does is, it casts light back on being on the inside.

Let's see if I can say it like this. Let's say it how Paul said it. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, ¹⁸ *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* It's folly to those on the outside who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Folly to those on the outside, the power of God to those on the inside. You having a fruitful heart is possible and it starts with you trusting Jesus, trusting the cross. A fruitful heart is possible, but let's get to the parable itself. It starts in verse 3. Let's start there with a point. Here's the second point.

A hard heart is disheartening

You don't have to be mean to have a hard heart. You see the parable in verses 3 and 4 and then you'll see Jesus' explanation over in verses 14 and 15. Let's read the parable first, and then the explanation. Verse 3. ³ *"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.* And then it goes to verse 14. ¹⁴ *The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.*

So we didn't do that on purpose, but the seeds have fallen on the path and that path has been walked on over and over and over again. It is packed so hard that nothing can penetrate. It is like concrete. This is the person in verses 13 and 14 who rejects the Gospel. This is the person who actually hears it, understands what you're saying and says I don't want that. The Gospel is like the seed hitting that path and it just sort of bounces off their hearts. Their unbelief is so settled that they are just unaffected. It's not that they're mean. They're just not affected. They are so hard that the seed of the Gospel won't penetrate. If you've ever planted grass and you put it in the spreader and you walk by and make the lines and seeds go everywhere and sometimes it will land out on the driveway on the concrete. That grass seed would just lay there on the concrete. Finally, birds come by and get it. This is what Jesus said. That's what Satan does with the Gospel that lays there on the hard heart. There is nothing wrong with the sower. There is nothing wrong with the seed. The seed is very good. There is nothing wrong with the message, there's just deadness. It's the soil you see. All of us here know people like this. They're just hard to it. What do we do then? How do we approach someone like that? I'll give you 2 things. We pray. So we pray for softening and then we're prepared to share. We pray for softening and we're prepared to share and oftentimes in the providence of God, what God does is He brings about events that can soften when the soil is so hard. Have you ever run a tiller on a hard clay ground. It is a little bit like running a jackhammer, but finally, the blades dig in and it softens up the ground? It takes some time and an event. Sometimes it's a tragedy. Sometimes it's being in a bad car wreck and people wonder, how did he survive that? And it jolts the person. And finally the ground is tilled up. Sometimes it's something good like the birth of a child or some sort of miraculous survival from a terrible disease. Sometimes it's a near-death experience and the ground is tilled up. And now we have got to be prepared to share the seed of the Gospel. So we live in prayer and we stand prepared. But a hard heart is disheartening. Let's go to the third point. #3.

A shallow heart is really common

A shallow heart is really common. This is going to sound really familiar. So the parable is in verses 5 and 6 and then Jesus' explanation is in verse 16 and 17. Let me read them for you. ⁵ *Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.* ⁶ *And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.* Now verses 16 and 17. What does Jesus say about it? ¹⁶ *And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.* ¹⁷ *And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.*

This is the one that we see far too often. This is the category that results in inflated church roles and lost church members. This is the story of somebody that sort of just fell out of the habit of going to church, because that's actually what they thought of Christianity, that it was just a habit, like biting your fingernails. This is the broad section of people that at some point displayed some sort of reaction, some sort of change. They identified in some way with the church. Maybe they even had some kind of dramatic experience and yet didn't count on the cost. This is partly why, in my estimation, we see a decline in church attendance. Jesus explains the category in verse 17. Notice what He says: They have no root in themselves. They're there for a while and everything's going okay but when tribulation and persecution come, they fall away. Now, this is not just going through a hard time. This is tribulation and persecution that arises on account of the Word. When that happens, they fall away. Here's what Jesus says. They heard the Word; they heard it, and immediately it looked like they were changed. It's so hard to tell sometimes because of emotionalism. Or it could be you grow up in a church culture, in a place where the Bible is taught to you. Sometimes, if you're not careful, you can get inoculated with the Gospel and therefore you never actually **get** the Gospel. I mean, the church can be a place where you get to know people, you have friends. You might even think that you want to live a life like that. You are trying to be a good person. You want to help others? Maybe you're conservative in your approach to politics and your views of how life is done.

BUT, there's never been a radical commitment to Christ and His Kingdom, it feels foreign to you. You understand that this is where Biblical Christianity is running headlong into a collision with America's culture. Biblical Christianity is running headlong into a collision because you can't really live as a Christian. You can't go to the store without feeling like you're compromising. I saw last night where the store Target is selling some of the foulest things. They are promoting the LGBTQ in a foul and even a satanic way. You can look it up later. I'm not going to talk about it in church, except to say you can't boycott everybody. You feel like it's just all around you. And Jesus is explaining here that when being a Christian starts costing, because of the Word, when that happens, falsely converted people will fade back into the woodwork.

And it's happening now. It's happening in the world we live in right now. Believing the Word of God and I don't mean a fire-breathing radical. If you just actually believe the Bible, believe the Word of God on the issues of the day, it has gotten downright dangerous. For some of you, it's cost you financially, it's cost your job. Maybe it cost you socially. It's hard to think about our kids who are graduating and we send them off to colleges knowing what some of the curriculum will be. The approach is the world view. If you're a public-school teacher, it's harder and harder, depending on your administration, the things that are expected of you.

I mean surely this is what John talked about in 1 John 2:19. John said ¹⁹ *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* I'm not talking about church members. I'm talking about being *in* Christ or *out* of Christ. So what do we do to combat this as a church? No system is perfect. But how do we work to make sure that the conversion is true? There are a couple of ways. One is we make it hard for people to join Hickory Grove Baptist Church. We don't just sign a card. We have an intense, significant, long conversation with that person so that there is a clear understanding of whether you're *in* Christ or *out* of Christ. One of the things we don't do here is spontaneous baptism. Hickory Grove will

baptize about 15 people today between both campuses. Every single person who is being baptized has spoken with a pastor about what it looks like to put your faith, by God's grace, in the atoning work of Christ. We don't say, "hey, if you want to be baptized, come on, we'll baptize you. I've got a swimming pool. Come on, I'll baptize you there." There's not any of that. It's not because we don't want to win people to Christ. It's because we *do* want to win people to Christ. When people have a clear understanding of the atonement, of what it does mean to be a Christian, that Jesus died in my place and God received that as the payment for my sin and now receives me as a child of God. That's why we press for genuine discipleship. So that you are part of a community group that then builds into a small discipleship group, where people are getting to know you and you're walking with God and learning the Bible. It's why we have a Bible-centric ministry for our students. Our children's ministry is not driven by entertainment, but by getting as much Bible into their hearts as we possibly can so that when the seed is planted, the nutrients are rich and it's germinated and bears much fruit. You see, the heart of true faith produces lasting fruit. So here are two bad soils, a hard path and then that rocky soil with the thin topsoil. There's one more bad soil left. Here's point #4.

A smothered heart is confusing.

Let's see what Jesus says in verse 7. It's the parable itself, and then the explanation in verses 18 and 19. ⁷ *Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.* The explanation is down in verses 18 and 19. ¹⁸ *And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,* ¹⁹ *but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.* This is a very confusing. It's confusing because there's nothing wrong with the soil. It's not hard-packed. It's not rocky. The soil is fine. In fact, other plants are growing there. The weeds and the thorns are growing there. We even know that weeds grow faster; that's why we might say, a kid is "growing like a weed." Weeds grow faster, they take up the nutrients of the soil, block out the sun. And look at the three things in verse 19

that Jesus says kills the Word. There are three things He gives us in verse 19. The first one is that the Word is choked out by the cares and the stresses, the concerns and the anxieties that life brings. It's the challenges of living during this age, getting the bills paid, taking care of the children, making sure they're okay. It's going through a terrible divorce and surviving that divorce. It's a situation at work. You never thought you would be this. Busy-ness. It's the cares of the world. It's trying to make sure that your children are successful in what they're doing. You want them to be happy and successful and healthy. There are the dramatic issues that come with all of that. Maybe you're fighting off some of the loneliness that goes with that. It's the cares of this world and what happens is they start to overrun what should be the most vibrant relationship you have.

Jesus gives us another one in verse 19. He says there's another thing that chokes out the Word. It's the deceitfulness of riches. It's deceiving because riches don't make you happy. This hits the wealthy and the poor. You are working all the time to get the money and it's deceitful because you think "I'll just get a little more." You are trying to make ends meet. Or, if you happen to be blessed with earthly goods, those goods become distractions. You've got to keep it all up.

And then verse 19 gives us a catch phrase. He says it's the desire for other things. It's idolatry. It's what happens is when Christ is to be the center and that which drives your life but it's the other things. You've heard it. I mean, people might even say "church really just isn't doing it for me anymore." If you can say "church is not really doing it for me anymore," what you had was the *shadow* and not the *substance*. If all you have is the *shadow*, then all of those things just sort of take you away from God. And if that's the case, you realize that you never actually had the saving belief in Jesus. You didn't trust that Jesus died on the cross for you. And it's so confusing. And at the end of verse 19, Jesus says, there's no fruit there. Do you know someone who just sort of faded? I mean, maybe even a really good, good family member has just sort of faded. This is a good parable to pray over or maybe even to read to that

person. If you go through Jesus' explanation of the parables, there is some commonality with those on the hard path in verse 15 and those in verse 16 in the rocky soil and those in verse 18, the thorny ground. Then you contrast that with the one good soil that Jesus teaches about. It's the last point.

A full heart is fruitful.

The parable is verse 8 The explanation of verse 20 let me read you. The parable first. *⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*" The explanation is in verse 20. *²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*" Just like all the other soils, they hear the Word but what's the difference? They accept it and bear fruit thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. Your Bible might say "and they received it." What that word means is "to take hold of and trust, to believe, and to put your faith in." And when you do that, when you actually trust and believe in Jesus and Jesus alone, when you take hold of the fact that He died on the cross for you, that God raised Him from the dead, and that can be yours, something supernatural happens, Jesus says it in verse 20. The whole parable is driving to verse 20, "thirtyfold and sixtyfold and even a hundredfold. All four of the groups heard the message. Three of them had varying degrees of a failed response. Only one group shows fruit. Today, in your hearing, the word of God has been sown. You have heard it. Now, by God's grace, I'm asking you to receive it. You see a heart of true faith produces lasting fruit. Ask God to save you according to the Gospel. Accept and receive. Let the Gospel drop into your soul and believe in the perfect life, the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus.

(Pastor prays)