

A Further Reach

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 4, who loves a good story? I think we all do. Sometimes people are prone to watch a good movie especially if they sing it to you.

But without television and digital devices the first century was filled with storytellers. Good storytellers.

But nobody could speak a truth better than the Lord Jesus. Man, he knew how to tell a story. He used stories a lot. And his stories fit the culture in which he lived.

The stories fit the settings in which he lived. But his stories turned everything upside down. He left people amazed.

And he told a lot of them. Matthew records more than 24. Luke records almost that many. Mark don't record many because he's in a hurry.

[1 : 25] Mark don't have time for stories. He's in a race to get to the cross. And he spends half of the gospel of Mark speaking of the last week of Christ.

However, he does include a few. We're going to look at the first one this morning together. It's in Luke chapter 4 beginning in verse 1 and it says this. Again, he began to teach beside the sea.

And a very large crowd gathered about him so that he got into a boat and set it on the sea. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

And he was teaching them many things in parables. And in this teaching, he said to them, listen. Behold, a sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path. And the birds came and devoured it. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil.

[2 : 29] And immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched. And since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns.

And the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain. Growing up and increasing and yielding 30-fold and 60-fold and 100-fold.

And then he said, he who has ears, let him hear. Now, the parables of Jesus, and they call these stories parables because parable means it comes alongside a truth.

The parables of Jesus often mystified and stupefied his listeners because he didn't explain them. He just told the story and moved on.

And some of them looked like I did when I took college English and we would read a story and I would get to class and they would explain what that story was really talking about. Looked like a mule at a new gate.

[3 : 32] Golly, you know. And that's what a lot of folks, when they heard these stories, his disciples were no better than that. They didn't understand. So he takes the time often to explain his stories to his disciples as he trains up these 12.

And thankfully, he shares that with us as well here in Mark because he explains it beginning in verse 14. And he says, The sower sows the word, 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. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while. And then when tribulation and persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches and the desires of the other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

[4 : 54] But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit 30-fold and 60-fold and 100-fold. The story is called the parable of the sower, but the emphasis is not so much on the sower as it is on the soils themselves, the different types of soil.

Now, it requires a sower, and that's where professed Christians come into the story. It requires a seed, and that's where the hope of Christ comes into the story.

And it requires scattering the seed and the sowing of that seed. Now, the sower is the one that shares Christ, and the seed is the message of Christ, the gospel message of Christ.

The soil is the state of the heart and the mind of a person. Now, Christians, what that means is that we all have a responsibility, that God gives every Christian responsibility and insight into our role in spreading the good news of Christ.

And with that, there are some commitments that we need to embrace. One of them is that we need to be aware. We need to be aware.

[6 : 17] We don't know the state of someone's life. There are several spiritual places that they can be, and Jesus names four of them. And let me explain what he means by that.

Some folks have a closed mind. The seeds which fall along the path fall on hard ground that the message never penetrates within their heart and within their mind.

And that message lays atop the ground, and the birds came down and took that seed and ate them. And sometimes the word of God is heard, but someone refuses to listen.

They're too hard-hearted to even consider what we say about the love of Christ. Now, I want to be clear about something. It's not our job to figure out the state of someone's heart.

That's not our job. It's not our job to figure out if they're willing to listen to what we have to say. It's our job to share it. And if we share it, let it fall where it may, leave the results up to God, you're not responsible for somebody's salvation.

[7 : 22] You're responsible with giving them the opportunity to be saved by understanding the gospel. Some people attend church, and they're preset on not listening. I can tell who you are, by the way.

But some folks come in and say, I'm not going to allow God to move in my life today. Their minds are made up before they ever come in the room. That's if they're even willing to come into the room. Because their minds are closed to any suggestion, and they refuse to follow. If that be the case, Satan easily snatches that truth from them like a bird snatches a seed.

It's gone. Then in verse 5 and 6, he speaks of a different state of mind, the rocky soil, which speaks of a clouded mind. And these seeds fall on rocky soil, and they shoot up quick, but they're scorched by the sun quick because they have no root base.

This shallow soil represents people who receive the word of God with joy, but they quickly fade away. Life gets real, and it happens fast.

[8 : 30] And they're clouded by the hardship or the pressure that they feel under. They love the thrill of a spiritual renewal, the recognition that goes with that, but it never really sinks in.

They're never committed to sink their roots into God's truth. There's a lot of people in a lot of churches that walk down the aisle and are baptized and are never seen again in that church. Many of them were never saved. And the evidence of that shows. I mean, they wanted the excitement. And listen, folks, I think we ought to get excited when somebody gives their heart and life to the Lord.

Some of y'all cheered yesterday, embarrassingly so. You know? For whoever you're rooting for, some of you cheered for two days.

I did. We get so excited. And then I watched at least part of six, seven, eight games over the last, sometimes four at a time, but over the last couple of days.

[9 : 44] Seriously. And I can't hardly tell you any of it right now, just to be honest with you. But it was good at the time, and I was excited about that. When somebody makes a commitment to Christ, I believe we ought to celebrate them.

I believe when they walk down this aisle that we ought to let them know how proud we are of them and how we're praying for them and how we'll be here for them. And when they go through those baptismal waters, I think we ought to cheer for them.

Like you did on your couch or like you did in a bleacher or like you did in a box or wherever you were yesterday, I think you ought to cheer for somebody who gives their heart and life to the Lord more than you do a touchdown. And let them know that.

And by the way, if they're kids and they're up in the baptismal area, I've told them they can't look out at you. If they look out at you, they go back up, they don't get baptized. That's the way I am. I run a strict ship. So they're not going to look at you.

So let them hear you. Cheer for them. I think it's something that we ought to celebrate with that. But I'll tell you, sadly, sometimes people, they get excited.

[10:53] They feel guilty about what they've done. They want to join the gang. They need a fresh start. But they don't really surrender their life to the Lord. Maybe it's a split decision in the moment and they're confused about the circumstances.

They're clouded by the world around them. And as soon as Monday comes, which is the trial, by the way, they fall apart and they fall away because they never really know Christ or who they could be in Him.

And their name lies on a Baptist church roll all over America. Churches are filled with people who they don't really know who they are. I'm telling you, oh dear God, my burden is I hope they're saved. Many of you know the deep burden that I have for that and I try to be as thorough as I can with the process that when somebody comes and shows an interest in the Lord Jesus that we sit down and we talk about that.

What does it mean to give your heart and life to the Lord? I sit down with parents with their kids and many times I give those parents some information to take home and work with their children and I say take 30 seconds to two minutes a night.

[12:09] Don't belabor the point but take 30 seconds to two minutes a night to go over these crucial verses and explain it to the point that let them be able to tell you what it means to give their heart and life to the Lord.

And then once they make that decision we try to follow that up with a new believer class for them to understand what it means to have given their life to the Lord. And it's a dear burden but clouded minds sometimes cause for false reactions and we need to be sensitive about making sure people understand what they're doing when they do it.

And then in verse 7 he speaks of a cluttered mind and the cluttered mind or that mindset is described as thorny ground because it quickly sprouts up but it gets choked out too quickly. And this describes a mindset that hears the word of God but its power and its personalization gets strangled out by the distractions of the world's empty promises and cares.

People that are like this place too much stock in what the culture values. They place too much stock in their time and their energy and they spend it worrying about themselves instead of concerned about the things of God.

How sad that is because it's a spiritual their spiritual potential is there but they're so busy and they're so distracted and they're so got so misplaced values that they smother out God's very best for them.

[13:42] It's hard for a cluttered mind like this to ever hear his voice. I'm with the Puritans. We need some time of silence and solitude before the Lord to let him speak to us to hear the word of God come to life within us.

I'm telling you it's a living document and when the Holy Spirit of God breathes through it it changes your life and if you'll just give him time to speak to your heart and life and not be so cluttered by so many other things the word of God often is choked out by the stuff that clutters our life and our mind.

And then lastly he speaks of a committed mind and that's where fertile soil where the seed of the gospel takes root and grows and people can become closed minded for two reasons.

One is that either pride compels them to believe they already know enough or either they become closed because they fear that hearing the truth will demand something of them that they don't want to give.

But a fertile mind is teachable. It's just like that of a child as a seven or eight year old that doesn't come to church with an unbelieving mind.

[14:59] They come to church with an openness and a humility. One of the greatest compliments I've ever got was last week when a grandparent brought a grandchild that normally is not in this church to this church and as they were leaving the grandparent told me my child told me that they understood what you said.

That when they go to church their preacher uses big words and they don't understand it but he understood what you said. I said I knew my simple mindedness would come in handy at some point. children remember more than we can imagine because the truth of God's word finds a place in a ready heart and then the Holy Spirit can bring that truth to their awareness when they need it. So how do we respond? I mean if we know the Lord Jesus how do we respond? Well let me first address this. if you don't know Christ if you've never committed your life to follow Christ then quit being closed quit being clouded quit being cluttered commit your life to Christ today.

It's the greatest investment you can make in your life. He'll forever change you. And for Christians we need to be aware we need to be aware that when we share with others hear me now we cannot control where that seed of truth falls.

We just need to make sure that it falls. Be aware. Second thing is be willing. I mean if God has commissioned believers to be sowers and the seed that we're to sow is the gospel message of salvation what are we doing about planting that seed and when and where are we scattering?

[16:55] We should not just do it in sure places. We ought to step out on the waters of faith and we should do it not just a few times we need to scatter seed abroad.

Now how do we do that? Well you talk to people. And when you talk to them you ask them if they place their faith in Christ. You ask them if they're sure that they're going to go to heaven when they die.

You tell them that they can know for sure. It's an easy way to have a conversation when you ask someone when I was a student at New Orleans Seminary they required us to pass a class that taught us continued witness training.

CWT was an intense evangelistic course in the 80s and the 90s that you had to learn a bunch of stuff and they gave us a blank sheet of paper and we had to complete about a 20 or 25 minute presentation verbatim to be able to graduate from New Orleans because when I was coming through they said if you want to learn how to preach go to Southwestern.

You want to learn how to teach go to Southern. You want to learn how to testify go to New Orleans. And New Orleans wanted to make sure we knew how to testify so we went door to door in New Orleans sharing Christ.

[18:18] And I'd ask somebody if you were to die today and stand before God and he were to ask you why should I let you into my heaven what do you think you'd say? I'm telling you it's an excellent question to ask somebody.

It don't have to be as complicated as I just made it either. If you were to die today and stand before God and he were to ask you why should I let you into my heaven what do you think you'd say?

And if they say I had several guys when I asked that they'd say please. But I hope you got more than please in your pocket. Because if they respond to you in any way beside because of what Christ did for me on the cross if they don't bring that up if they talk about how good they've been or how they hope they're okay if they give you anything it's open for the gospel.

Open for the gospel. Because your behavior is not going to determine your destination in eternity. It's not. Your commitment to Christ that'll change your behavior by the way but your commitment to Christ is the determining factor for that and it's an obvious way to share that.

Tell them they know for sure. Tell them that it's the greatest gift is eternal life through Christ. Tell them what Romans 10 9 says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved as guaranteed.

[19:45] Don't walk by and act as if it does not matter. Don't come up with an excuse. Invite them to church. Invite them to come and hear the gospel. If you'll bring them to Pickens First Baptist Church I'll make sure they hear the gospel.

I guarantee it. You say well preacher they won't come. You have hear me you have no idea what soil you're dealing with today.

Well I just talked to them yesterday. Well that's yesterday. God works and moves in people's life constantly. You don't have any idea where that's going to fall when you invite them.

When you give them opportunity. God continues to work and move. The soils of the hearts change for good and bad over time. Trust the Lord in the matter and do the work that God has called you to. Be willing. Third thing is be prayerful. Be prayerful because prayer is where the power is. Pray that God will save the sinner. Pray that God will give you the burdens for those who are lost without Christ.

[20 : 50] If you've never shared your faith with other people if you've never done that and you're a believer pray that God would give you the opportunity. It'll change your life.

Pray that God will give you the words to say. Pray that the Spirit of God will move in the conversation. That it'll echo in their hearts. I've told people that I've shared Christ with and they were not receptive to it.

I've told them I'm going to pray for you daily that you'll be miserable until you give your life to Christ. I have and I'll do it again too so that they would understand I'd rather you be miserable here than miserable for all of eternity.

I hope he leaves you up at night until you call me and say I want Christ in my life. Pray that God will open another door of opportunity.

Pray that God will give clarity in the conversation and in the afterthoughts. If you'll pray that way and you'll leave that prayer expecting I'm telling you something God will make it happen.

[22 : 01] He's the Lord of the harvest where the scatters of seed and I want to give you a warning because if you'll get this burden in your heart and you'll look for opportunities sometimes you'll walk away from a conversation with someone and you'll realize afterwards you missed the opportunity.

You missed it. You had it but you missed it. And you may feel hounded by that. Thank God sometimes God opens doors twice.

Now I'm not encouraging you to wait until the second time but if you miss it trust God to open it again and then when he does walk through it follow his lead trust him.

Be prayerful there's power in prayer. Next thing is be sharing. Scatter the seed. Don't just pray about it. Do it. Invite folks to come and hear the gospel.

Another story that Christ shared in Luke chapter 12 verse 16 through 20 it says this and he told them a parable saying the land of a rich man produced plentiful and he thought to himself what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops and he said I'll do this I will tear down my barns and I'll build larger ones and there I'll store all my grain and my goods and I'll say to my soul soul you have ample goods laid up for many years relax eat drink be merry but God said to him fool this night your soul is required of you and the things that you prepared whose you will they be so it is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God this is a reminder that if we get so busy successfully or struggling either way if we get so busy that we forget eternal things we need to be careful because whether we're struggling or whether we're successful either way not only could our souls be required of us but it could be required of our neighbors as well this could be the day of the last breath have we done all we could hear me today we're not responsible for the condition of the soul which is the soil we're not responsible for the convicting we can't convict anybody we're not responsible for the harvest

[24 : 20] I've never saved anybody nor have you we are responsible for the scattering I have a handheld broadcaster it's a little device that you can put some seed in the top of it it's got a little crank on the side of it man you crank that around you can throw that stuff better than you can with the arm when I turn the wheel it throws the seed and the harder the wheel turns the more seed it thrown out and the further it goes the same is true for the gospel broadcast the love of God turn hard at it let it spread wide and often do it at school do it at work do it at home do it with your neighbors do it at!

at ball games do it at the grocery store just watch and see what happens God blesses such as that I'm just telling you and lastly be sacrificial we're responsible for spreading but we can only spread so far with our voice on our feet and I mentioned that I have a handheld broadcaster that I have but I also have a larger one that I pull behind my lawnmower and it does a lot more than that handheld thing does it throws out the seed so much further that it reaches places that I can't even walk into sometimes and that's what the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for international missions does for us it scatters the seed from pickings across the world

God has called men and women and families to go and as he's called them to go he's called us to support them as they go to prayerfully support them to sacrificially support them their sacrifices are amazing and because their sacrifices are amazing ours should be too God gave me a burden about this years ago and I try to travel internationally every year if God will allow me to to be able to touch base with missionaries that are on the field and the sacrifices they make I don't feel called to do what they do but I feel called to go and find out what they do and find out how we can help them and how we can pray for them and to come back and drum up support prayer support giving support asking God to allow them to remain on the field and serve the Lord praying that

God would provide more to go pray that those who feel called to go will have the resources to be able to go we've got people that feel called to go that are qualified to go that have been certified to go and are waiting to go we have the opportunity in the month of December to cast seed into those fields that we will never see to enable those who are called and waiting to go to get the green light I mean we can touch hearts that will never meet this side of eternity won't have be fun think about that they'll go in places that will never travel they'll speak in languages that will never speak people let's spread seed further than we can ever imagine and pray that God will get in it and bring a bountiful harvest because we've done our part both here I'm not letting you off the hook both here and over there the sacrifice is big if you look at the front of your worship bulletin you'll see that our goal this year is \$70,000 that's greater than our needs for three weeks in our budget and the task is huge and the task is worldwide and I ask you to give as God allows you to give and I want to be clear just a teaching tool here

I believe in storehouse tithing I believe that you ought to give your tithe to the Lord where you're fed and as God enables you to give more than that tithe then you give it to special causes as God leads you to Lottie Moon is a special cause don't misplace God's money and put it there ask God to give you the ability to give as he would enable you to give to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering I grew up my church I grew up in had a post office at Christmas time and if you would bring your Christmas cards don't mail them but if you'd bring your Christmas cards to church and you'd pay a quarter and I think a stamp was 19 cent then so they were making some money but if you'd bring that and give a quarter for every card that you gave to people in the church all that money would go to

[29 : 43] Lottie Moon and then you could go by the post office and see if you get any mail see if you get Christmas cards and then get mad at people who don't bring you money and I remember hearing that that's what I remember about Lottie Moon growing up and when I started preaching and became a pastor over 30 years ago I got some stuff in the mail about Lottie Moon Christmas offering and I started reading it and studying and preparing for it to speak on it and I was blown away God convicted my heart and I wanted to give to it and I didn't have the money to give to it I mean I was full-time pastor making half-time pay you know I would tithe my money and I would write on the calendar what I had given and what I owed and said Lord help me make up the difference and I wanted to give Lottie Moon and I didn't have to give I don't remember if I gave anything that year if I didn't give much

I don't remember the deal but I remember God planted something in my heart and I don't know where it came from except by the Holy Spirit of God but he planted something in my heart and I took my change the next year and I stuck it in a coffee jar I don't know to be honest I don't know if Lottie got my quarters or not but I stuck my change in that jar God had given me a figure in my head that year I couldn't give much and I started throwing my change in that jar this is actually when you had change remember those days but anyway I started throwing my and when I got to the end of the year I took that change out and I rolled it and I counted it and it was almost exactly the figure that God had given me the previous Christmas and he planted something in my heart about how at Christmas time we need to give a

Christmas gift to missions to be faithful to give as God gives us opportunity this is a task that is huge it is worldwide but it's also very personal because it starts when you get up in a few minutes and walk out that door you're to be scattering don't wave ugly signs at the people who don't stop quick enough in a row don't do that in front of the church share the gospel as you go scatter seed and let's impact people's lives right here in Pickens as Jesus put it in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost that we'll never see with our own eye let's give faithfully let's be all we can be for the Lord let's reach as far as we can for Christ most importantly

I want you to hear this morning if you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ the greatest life that you can have on this earth is one that is with Christ and I have prayed that seed will fall on fertile soil today that's ready to receive the gospel message if you'll acknowledge the sin in your life ask God to forgive you of that sin and commit your life to follow Christ today he'll save you he'll change you we'll come alongside you we'll nurture you we'll help you grow in him but if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord I don't care if everybody in this room thinks you have or nobody thinks you have if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord when we stand and sing in just a moment I want you to come and say pastor I want to be saved maybe you're here and you have done that but you've never acknowledged that publicly it's always been something private in your heart it's not something just to be private in your heart it's something to publicly

profess if you've never done that I encourage you to come we guide you in the next steps to what that means maybe you're here and God's leading you to Pickens First Baptist Church this is the place that you would plant your life you feel led that way we'll guide you in that process as well I don't know what God's telling you to do I don't know what he's laid upon your heart but I know you'll never be satisfied unless you're obedient to follow him so do exactly what he tells you to do this morning Heavenly Father I love you and I thank you Lord for the love that you have for us and I ask right now dear God that you'll help us to simply be obedient to follow exactly what you'd have us to do help us be satisfied with nothing less help us do nothing more than simply obey you lead and guide us right now as I pray in Jesus name amen do