

# Mark - the Sower, the Seed & the Soil 1

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*Jesus teaches that the parabolic method is used to hide truth from those who would misuse it and to make truth open to those who are humble and teachable, and that the seed of the word of God must be sown in order to bring life.*

**Duration:** 53:16

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:1-8, Matthew 13:44-46, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:5-15

**Topics:** "Parable"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils as found in Mark chapter 4. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the quality of the soil in determining the fruitfulness of the seed. The preacher highlights the first type of soil, referred to as the wayside soil, which represents a hardened heart that does not receive the Word of God. The sermon also discusses the purpose of Jesus using parables, both to hide the truth from those who would misuse it and to make it open and inviting to those who are humble and teachable.

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## Transcript

Continuing with our studies in St. Mark's Gospel, we are going to turn this morning to the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils. And you will find that in Mark chapter 4 verses 1 to 20. It's very helpful, of course, to remember that you have the same parable in the Gospel of Matthew and that written by Luke.

In Matthew 13, 1 to 8, 18 to 23, and then in Luke 8 verses 5 to 15. We shall be basing our meditation and our study very largely upon what we have here in Mark, though we shall be looking over the pages from time to time and seeing whether there may be something extra that the other two evangelists tell us. Now, it's necessary to remember, I think, that this is not the first time that our Lord Jesus used the parabolic method.

He has done this before. He has spoken of the children of the bride chamber, of old and new wine being put in old and new wineskins. That was parabolic teaching.

Then again in chapter 3, we were reading of the binding of the strong man. That again is an illustration of a parable. But at this point in his ministry, our Lord begins consistently now, from now on, he begins a consistent approach which is new.

There is a reason for this. We are not going into the details of that today. We may on another occasion.

But he deliberately chooses from now on to teach by means of this parabolic method. By that, he is going to withhold some of his pearls from those who cannot appreciate them and will not. And at the same time, he is going to feed and nourish and satisfy those who have a hunger and thirst after righteousness.

So the use of the parabolic method has a twofold application. It hides truth from those who would only misuse it. Scribes, Pharisees, critics whose hearts have been hardened and whose minds have been closed to truth.

It hides the truth from them. At the same time, it makes the truth open, inviting to those who are humble before their God and who have the spirit of teachableness. Now, you will notice that reading this parable, I guess it almost naturally divides into three.

We have given our title, the sower, the seed, and the soil. And I think we can look at it in this way. But they're of unequal length, of course.

But let's first of all say a word about the sower here. It's very wonderful how our Lord chose to use, for his parabolic preaching and teaching, some of the most simple things of everyday life, some of the most ordinary occurrences or illustrations from life. The sower was a very familiar character in ancient Palestine.

And it could very well be that the sight of someone in a neighboring field casting seed into the soil was either the occasion of our Lord doing this here, or if not the occasion, it gave added point and significance to it. Sowing was normally done by hand. I guess most of us have seen this taking place.

Normally, the sower would have a bag over his shoulder in which he had grain, and he would dip his hand in, perhaps two hands, and then as he went over the field, he would just scatter the seed like that. At other times in New Testament days, they would have a sack on the back of an ass. And the ass would carry the main burden of the seed, and the man would replenish his bag from time to time as he needed, and so they would go along.

And yet at other times, they sowed in this way. They punctured the bag on the ass's back. I think this is quite cunning.

And they had a few holes in the bag, and they made the ass carry the burden, and then the sower would just lead the ass from one end of the field to the other, backwards and forwards, until the seed in the bag had come to an end. It's a very simple picture, and our Lord takes it up here. The sower.

And our Lord, of course, was doing exactly that at this point. He was sowing the seed. He was teaching.

He was disseminating. He was broadcasting the word of the Lord. That's exactly what he was doing, scattering the seed.

The image, of course, equally applies to any man at any time who is doing what his Lord was doing here. If you go out in the morning with the seed of the word of God and scatter it, if you go to a Sunday school class and teach, or a Bible class during the week, or whatever you have, or a circle, this is exactly what you're doing in New Testament language, or in the parabolic language of this passage. It's scattering the seed of the word of God, and you become thereby a sower.

So much for the sower. A word about the seed. Now, Jesus had only one kind of seed, which he was pledged to sow at all times, in all places, in season and out of season.

He tells us in verse 14, the sower soweth the word. It was the gospel of the kingdom, the rule of the heavens, the rule of God, the truth about God, the word of God. It was part of his policy and purpose to scatter that word wherever he went.

And you will hardly find an incident recorded concerning the life of our Lord where he isn't sowing the seed. You can see it. You read the Gospels one after another, and it's a picture of our Lord going hither and thither, sowing the seed.

I don't want to pursue that, but that's exactly what the gospel narrative is all about. It's Jesus from beginning to end, sowing the seed in life and in death, with a few, with a multitude. It is very noteworthy, I think, that towards the end of his life, John 17, our Lord comes to sum up what he has done to that point.

As he sees the end appearing, he sees the cross on the horizon, and now very near, he says to his heavenly Father, he says, I have given them thy word. I've given them your word. And in another place, the words, in the plural, which you have given me, I have given them.

It's a remarkable testimony given in the presence of God, and both of these were. The Savior received his words from God, and all the words made one word, one message. And he says, I've delivered the words, and I've delivered the word.

I've given them your word. And because of that, he could hand over his disciples to the Father, and he says, now it's all right, Father. I've given them thy word.

You sanctify them through the truth. You keep them. You guard them through the truth.

Sanctify them. Your word is truth. I've given them that word that is able to keep them.

If we would be faithful followers of the heaven-sent sower, we must not only be actively sowers, but sowers of the same seed, the very word of God. It is so easy for us to talk about ourselves, so easy to talk religion, talk philosophy, talk science, talk this, talk that, talk politics. If we are to follow our Lord, and if we are to be sowers, we should be sowers of the seed of the word.

Let us make sure of that. The renowned Alexander White of the Freed Church in Edinburgh used to spend some time on his knees every morning. One thing he sought, among other things, there were many other things, but it is said he sought the word for the day.

By that he meant this. He would find some passage of scripture that he believed God wanted him to share with people for that day, and he would go out into the highways and the byways and into the homes of the people, and wherever he went, he got his message across. My dear Christian people, if you and I knew something of that, we should see life becoming a garden around us.

Not altogether, because there will be weeds in the garden too. But if we sought the word and the words of the Lord for the day, and went out to spread the seed, deliberately, purposefully, consistently, the word of the Lord is very similar to the seed. There are similarities.

The word of God has the quality and power to reproduce. The word of God has seminal power. It can bring life.

It's a wonderful thing. You never know who there is in a service such as this. There may be somebody coming in here this morning who is spiritually dead.

You don't know what it's all about. The name God is just comprising of three letters, G-O-D. Who is he? What is he? Where is he? You just don't know.

But where the seed of the word is sown, at any given moment, it may come to life in the soul, and God is made known. Not only has it seminal and reproductive power true to its nature, it produces after its own kind. A grain of wheat will only reproduce wheat.

Paul puts it like this, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If you want a crop of rye, you don't sow oats. You sow rye.

And if you want to produce this quality of life that we have in the New Testament, you must sow the seed that corresponds to it, and the seed that produces eternal life is the word of God. It produces life after its kind. To effect its work of reproducing according to its own kind, however, the seed has to be sown.

In the words of our Lord elsewhere, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. It remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

It's a tremendous responsibility, you see. This is why Jesus says, listen here. Over and over again he says it in this context.

Listen, hearken, listen, listen. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. What does he want us to hear? One thing is this.

You have the seed, believer. You have the seed that can bring life to the dead, light to the blind. You have that seed, but it must be sown.

And it is possible that no one else will walk the path that you walk. And if you don't sow the seed, it'll never be sown. I have a feeling that our Lord sensed, you see, that people would take the parables as nice little pictures.

Oh, beautiful, beautiful. And admire the whole thing aesthetically, linguistically. It's so beautiful.

Listen, he says, hearken. If you've got ears to hear, let him hear. It's important, he says, the seed's got to be sown.

But now that brings us to the main aspect of the whole issue of this parable. We're not going to deal with it all today, obviously. I have to come back to this.

Here we have the seed which is capable of producing the word, the life of God in the soul of man, eternal life. Here we have the Son of God proclaiming that seed. Yet not everybody is saved.

Did you get that? Now I have a feeling, you see, that some of us think that if only our Lord came back today to preach, everybody would be converted. If only we had an apostle Paul that came back down into the 20th century and stood and preached in the open air or in the pulpit here or anywhere else, everybody would be converted. Or if we had the great Whitefield or Jonathan Edwards or John Wesley or Charles T. Finney or who have you.

You know, this parable tells us that is not so. Everybody to whom Jesus, the incarnate word, preached the word, everybody did not receive it. And what is more baffling is this.

Some people pretended or professed to receive it, and it later turned out that they'd done nothing of the kind. In the providence of God, I was reading last evening something that you good people, you Canadians, will know all about, I'm sure. But I'd never heard of it before.

Pardon my ignorance. I shouldn't confess it, perhaps. But it's the story of George C. Bolt who built his castle on the St. Lawrence.

You will remember how he engaged the finest architects and artists in the world. He quarried the finest granite and purchased the rarest marble and mosaics and rich tapestries from all around the world to build this castle. He was so eager to pay tribute to his wife, whom he loved so dearly.

Two million dollars had been spent. I'm sure you know about it. Two million dollars had been spent, and the castle was near completion when the bottom went out of his life.

His wife died. In one brief hour, the castle was transformed, so the writer says, and I quote, From a scene of great activity, it quickly had become a tomb of quiet. Workmen dropped their tools.

The place became deserted. Birds and bats came to make their nests in the quiet, dusty halls. Spiders spun their webs over fireplaces and in stairways.

Today, I take it it's true today as when this was written a few years ago, today the scene of what was planned for gaiety remains a monument to heartache, an uncompleted dream, a hollow, dusty pile of aging stone. Its towers pierce the skies, and remaining windows still reflect the glimmer of the sun, but its insides are left empty. The hollow ruin of what might have been.

That phrase has been with me all night, the hollow ruin of what might have been. And you know, my friends, there are men and women who've begun to build what appeared to be at first Christian character and Christian experience, but it never came to anything. But the hollow, hollow, hollow ruin of what might have been, the question is why? Now let's look at what our Lord says.

We have the answer here, really, in the fact that much depends on the quality of the soil into which the seed is sown. Even though the sower be the divine son of God, even though the seed be the word of God, the result in terms of fruit depends very largely upon the kind of soil into which that seed is sown. And what our Lord says in this parable is this, there are four kinds of soils.

And I want to look at one or two of them this morning, and we'll return to the subject in the goodwill of God next Lord's day. Now look at the first here. It's called, or I'm going to call it the wayside soil.

Verse four, the King James Version says, some seed fell by the wayside. The RSV puts it differently. Some seed fell along the path.

Well, it comes to the same thing. Now we need a little background here. Palestinian fields were usually long strips of territory, long strips of territory.

They were not separated from one another by the kind of hedges that you have in some parts of the world, notably in the UK, but also in other parts. Nor indeed were these plots of land, these fields separated from each other by anything like barbed wire fences. On the contrary, the thing that separated them was usually

a narrow footpath.

Simple as that, a narrow footpath. Might be your field on this side of the footpath. It may be somebody else's feet on the other side, field on the other side of the footpath.

Sometimes the path was quite wide. Sometimes it was the main highway from a point A to point B. And you went in between two fields that might have been sown and perhaps at that very moment producing some grain. You remember the story of the disciples on the Sabbath morning, plucking the grains as they went.

And they were criticized for rubbing the grains in their hand and eating it. You remember. Well, now they were walking along one of these paths, separating one field from another.

They didn't go over a hedge in order to get it. They just took what was there right at hand. It was as simple as that.

But now the point is this. Those paths generally became very hard. They had never been tilled.

No plow had gone that way, you see. Nobody had tilled that part of the soil which constitutes a path. The plow hadn't gone that way.

The chisel hadn't gone that way. The harrow hadn't gone that way. It had never been tilled.

It had never been turned. It was just as it was, untilled and hard. What's more, insofar as it was a pathway for the public, well, the soil became harder and harder and harder and harder with the passage of time.

Now, says our Lord, the sower sows the seed and some seed falls by the wayside on the path. Not purposely, of course. No man would sow seed there purposely because he, if he was a sower, he would know that nothing would become of it.

But accidentally, some seed fell on the pathway. What happened? Well, our Lord sums it up in this way, the birds of the air came and devoured them. See, the point is this.

It was so hard, the seed could only fall on the surface. Could never be buried because the soil was not broken and not soft. And so the seed that fell, it would be almost like it falling on this book in front of me, on this Bible.

It might become a little embedded in the soil if you stepped on it, as Luke says, but it could never be buried. And so the birds of the air, hungry as usual, come swooping down and they have a good feast. Now, what's the application of that? Well, the interpretation and application is crystal clear.

Our Lord leaves us in no doubt whatsoever. That's wonderful here. I'm always afraid of pictorial language in the scripture that we are left to interpret ourselves.

So many people have different interpretations of such passages. Here, you simply cannot go wrong because Jesus tells us what it means. What does it mean then? Well, verse 15.

These are the ones along the path where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them. Have you got the picture? What Jesus is saying is this.

Our human hearts are very much like that pathway. Naturally speaking, we're terribly hard and inhospitable to the word of the living God. We far easier believe the words of men than we do the word of God.

We're far more hospitable and receptive to the words of a philosopher, a scientist, even a politician. And they change their minds so often according to the winds that prevail. I'm sorry to have to say that, but it's so true these days.

But we believe men before we believe God. We are very open to what men will tell us. But to the word of God, we are like the path that has been so hard and so often trodden that the seed only comes on the surface.

On the surface. It just impinges upon the tympanum of the ear and we kind of hear the sound of the word and we have this inbuilt capacity to see that it doesn't get any deeper. The human heart is naturally inhospitable to the word of God.

The natural man, says Paul, receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. The ordinary man, the ordinary sinner in our natural estate, if we were left to ourselves, we would never receive the word of God. The spirit of God has to convince us and convict us and give us the capacity.

It's as bad as that. But that condition is worsened by the general influence of people upon us, of society, of the age in which we live. I have once before in this series on Mark quoted from an old exposit of the late Dr. Alexander McLaren of Manchester, England.

And I want to quote again just one little crisp statement of his in reference to this. He puts it like this, the heavy baggage wagons of commerce the light cars of pleasure, merry dancers and sad funeral processions have all used that path and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little firmer. My friends, it's a tremendous picture and it is so challenging that life in this world, which is Godless, can so harden us that the very word of God preached by the son of God to whom the father does not give the spirit in measure, that very word of God preached by the son of God simply falls on the surface of our consciousness.

And like the proverbial water on a duck's back flows off and does nothing. Circumstances of the habit of positively hardening our hearts so that the word of God only comes onto the superficial stratum of our makeup. Now there's something frightening about this.

See, let's get down to it now. Let's apply it to ourselves. Here you are, you have your time every day as a Christian man or a Christian woman when you read the word of God.

And you go to your closet and you lock the door like a good Christian person does, be it morning, noon or night, you do that, don't you? And you listen to the word of God. And I tell you, you can saturate yourself in reading the word, enjoying the language, comparing one version with another. And yet the whole thing doesn't prick through your skin.

It doesn't penetrate mind nor conscience. And it doesn't move the will. And it doesn't make you sad or glad.

It's just superficial. If we put it in a different way, it is possible to come out on a Sunday morning even through the snow and the slush. And because of the traffic of commerce and circumstances and business

and what have you, what have we in our homes and in our neighborhoods, we come together and we are so hardened by all this that though an archangel Gabriel stand before us propounding the truth of God, it just doesn't penetrate.

And we go away and the only thing we can say is we've been to church. And that's all. The Lord has not come into our soul.

The spirit and the word have not broken in. The seed has only fallen on the wayside. And it's only remained there long enough for the devil to come down and take it away and devour it.

Will you agree with me that this is a serious business? No wonder Jesus said, listen, hearken, listen, hearken. Him that hath ears to hear, let him hear. You see, this is really touching the very vitals of our Christian profession.

That's why I can't hurry through it. Now, let me just give you one or two illustrations of this, lest you think I'm going too far. I can quote you illustrations of this from the New Testament very clearly, of course.

And perhaps that's the best thing to do. Now, for example, take this, take this illustration. Over and over again, we find that there were people like the intelligentsia of the day and the ecclesiastical leaders of the day listening to our Lord Jesus, scribes and Pharisees.

Now, I refer to them because they were intelligent according to their age and day. They were usually the most intelligent people, and they were well-trained. Some of us would be surprised if we knew how well-trained they were according to the disciplines of the age.

And they came to hear our Lord. And invariably, the result of their hearing the Word of God preached by the Son of God in the power of the Spirit of God was this. Their hearts just became harder and harder.

Every now and again, one here, one there, one there, came under conviction of sin and was transformed and redeemed and became a new creature in Christ Jesus. Saul of Tarsus is an illustration, a member of the Sanhedrin. But generally, see, it made them harder.

They did nothing. They could just shrug it off. The incarnate Lord is the preacher, and the Word is the Word of the Lord.

But they could shrug it off. Or if you like, move into a different setting, not altogether different, but move with the Apostle Paul to Mars Hill in Athens. And here you find the great intelligentsia of ancient Athens meeting together.

And what are they doing? Well, you see, they're coming like the judges of all men and of all mankind with their intellectual apparatus in use. They're there to sit in judgment upon any and every philosophy. Oh, they love to hear anything new, anything new, anything novel.

Is there anything out today? Any new book? Any new idea? Any new suggestion? Anything new? And there they are, and they sit in judgment. The great intelligentsia sitting in judgment. And they try to do exactly the same with the Word of the Gospel.

Rather than be judged by it, they would sit in judgment upon it. And most of them died in their sins, though they heard the Word of life. You have another illustration from Paul's ministry.

Take, for example, and this is only one of them, Felix. You remember in Acts chapter 24, Felix had listened to the Apostle Paul speaking about righteousness and self-control and judgment to come. And then he turns to Paul and he says, literally, the NIV puts it like this, that's enough for now, you may leave.

That's enough for now, don't tell me any more about that. I don't want to be influenced by that. Or Agrippa, almost thou persuades me, yes, yes, but I'm not persuaded.

So much for that. Apart from the question that I ask myself, and I invite you to ask with me. Can I this morning be something similar to that? The circumstances of joys and sorrows, privileges and responsibilities, the circumstances of my life have made of me a hard pavement, and my life is just like that.

And though the Word of God be given me, it doesn't puncture the skin, let alone get into the heart. Men and women, if this is true of us, we ought to be on our knees, crying to God for mercy. Now come to the second, and then I'm through this morning.

The rocky soil. Look at verse 5, King James Version says, some fell on stony ground. The NIV puts it more accurately, some fell on rocky places.

Now, in the light of what we've said about the first one, some of you may be tempted to ask, well, isn't this identical with it? Isn't this exactly the same thing? You said the pathway was so hard that the seed did not penetrate at all, and now we read about rocky places. Surely it comes to the same thing. Well, no, it doesn't.

We need a little bit of background here. Concerning these people, our Lord says that they received the Word with joy, and there was a profession of faith. They received it, but it came to nothing in the end.

Now, the background we need to know is of a geological nature. In Galilee in particular, you have a kind of soil in which there is an underlying shelf of limestone. And it comes very near the surface, so that what you have is a couple of inches of soil, just literally a couple of inches.

It may even be down to an inch in some places. But you have that slight, shallow layer of soil, and underneath the soil there is a shelf of limestone rock, you see. Now, we'll use this hymn book this morning as the rock, the shelf of rock.

And now, on top of it, you must imagine a little layer of soil. Now, the seed is sown, and it is sown into that soil, and the soil receives it immediately. And there's an immediate sprouting.

The little seed is coming to life. But then our Lord goes on to say, even though the seed comes to life, something happens. The sun rises.

The heat is turned on, the heat of persecution, as he comes to explain it later on. It's all symbolic of that, the heat of persecution, the heat of difficulties turned on. And suddenly, the seed that has been sown into this thin layer of soil withers away, and it comes to nothing.

Now, that's the parable. What's the application of it? With such words, our Lord Jesus Christ described the type of human soil that almost instinctively responds to the Word of God. In verse 16, it goes like this, they immediately receive it with joy.

They immediately receive it with joy. And you have people like this in church. You have people like this in a Sunday school class.

You have people like this who go to our great campaigns and our great crusades, and they're only waiting for the invitation to be given, and they receive it with joy. Now, I'm not criticizing them necessarily, but I'm going to criticize something in a moment. They receive it with joy.

They're glad to hear it, and out they go, and they say, yes, Lord. And insofar as they know themselves, they're sincere. But then the heat is turned on.

Tribulation and persecution on account of the Word, verse 17. And immediately, when this tribulation is turned on, when this trial, when this heat is turned on, something happens. The little thing that is beginning to bud begins to wither.

And it fades, and it just dies away. So that what appeared to be the beginnings of life is strangled at birth. It never comes to anything.

And Luke, being the doctor, uses a word which is very significant. It's the word, it never really comes to fullness, to maturity, as a fetus would come to life. Now, the sad feature of such an apparently genuine response is that it is only superficial.

And it is superficial for this reason. You see, in all of our hearts, in your heart and mine, now don't get cross with me, it's not my word, it's the master's. But in your heart and mine, though we may have professed to receive the gospel of our Lord, there may still be a layer of rock underneath.

It has never been broken. A whole layer of rock underneath in the subconscious mind somewhere. And though we have superficially received the message, inwardly we are resisting its implications.

So that we've said yes to Jesus, and we're saying no to Jesus in our hearts at the same time. Yes, you are my savior, but don't ask me to do this, don't tell me that, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't ask this of me. Yes and no.

And there's this rock underneath the surface, and I'm really a Jekyll and Hyde. I'm a Mr. Two-Face, in Bunyan's words. I'm soft and responsive superficially, and I've received the word with joy, but there is this rock in the depth of the soul that refuses to let the word get down into the depths and do its work.

Now, I want you to notice the distinction. In the first type of soil we considered, the hardness was external and superficial, so that the seed gained no real access into the soil at all. It remained within the reach of the birds.

Here, in the second type, the word, the seed, gains access all right. It was actually joyfully received, but with limitations. In the first place, there was no opposition to its entrance.

Sorry, there was opposition to its entrance. In the second case, there is opposition to its progress. Now, my friends, as I understand it, you see, what Jesus is saying is this.

Medicine in the mouth won't heal you of your disease. You've got to swallow it. I watched someone this week.

I shouldn't tell tales, should I? But I did watch someone this week taking some medicine. I won't tell you whether it's a man or a woman, young or old, but evidently it wasn't very nice to test. And I watched this person just turning it around in the mouth, you know.

Shall I or shall I not? Listen, my friend, medicine in the mouth will not heal you of anything. It's got to be swallowed. And it's got to get into the bloodstream.

It's got to get down. It's got to get into the depths. And the gospel in the head or the gospel in the mouth will not save a man or a woman.

It's got to get into the depths, into the conscious, yes, and ultimately to the subconscious mind so that we can say with a psalmist, Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. So that there in the depths, it works, it sanctifies, it satiates the innermost yearning of my spirit, and it sanctifies and saves me. But the word's got to get down there, you see.

My friend, is there anything that keeps the holy word of God from getting down and down and down into your soul today? My good people, members of Knox, don't be angry with me for putting this to you. Tell me, are you prepared for the word of God to get through the skin to where it hurts? Why is it that there is no more blessing upon our ministries? There is, and we thank God for what there is. We must not underestimate or underevaluate the day of small things and people coming to know the Lord and going on, on, on, on.

Not that sin, please. But my friends, if we are all what we profess to be, if we're all in touch with the Lord and we all have the word of the Lord and we all go out on a Monday morning with the word of the seed, the seed of the word to declare, and we all believe in prayer, and we all believe in an omnipotent God, surely something more should be happening. And I'm asking you as I'm asking myself, Lord, is it because your word is only just coming in under the surface so that I'm joyfully receiving it, but there's this rock that has not been broken? And there is this opposition.

When I see the implications of it, I say, no, Lord, there are moral standards you see in the Bible, and they're very stringent. A man rang me up this week and he says, look, I'm really getting hurt. I find that I've accepted Jesus as my savior, but he's asking, I read such and such a passage and Jesus is asking me to do such and such a thing.

He says I didn't bargain for that. Okay, that's exactly it, you see. There was a rock underneath.

And you know, many of us will never get anywhere until that rock is shattered to smithereens. And the word that we receive has got to get down and live in us and churn our souls inside out until we are made anew. You have illustrations of this in the New Testament.

Do you read? I'm sorry. I have blundered again. Right, high floors.

I'll just tell you this. Do you read Bunyan these days? You know, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. It is a tremendous blessing when you learn to read it prayerfully.

He talks about a certain character whom he calls Mr. Temporary. Mr. Temporary. And he says he lived in a town called Graceless.

A town, says Bunyan, that was about two miles away from another town called Honesty. He was two miles away from Honesty. And his roommate was none other than Mr. Turnback.

Now you meet such people in the New Testament in real life as well as in our contemporary situation. Do you remember those guys in John 6? They wanted to make Jesus king. Oh, they were so enthusiastic.

The whole crowd. He's fed the thousands out of a few loaves and fishes. What, what, what, what, what? But make him king.

He's the king for us. But then he went on to teach. And he began to tell them things he hadn't told them before.

And oh boy, as they heard a little more of his teaching, they all went away. And it even seemed as if the twelve were going to go. And Jesus turns to the twelve and says, will you also go away? Do you remember Paul speaks about one of his friends and fellow servants of the Lord, a chap called Demas.

In one of his writers, he speaks of Demas, says with me, and he speaks of him in another as Demas, my fellow laborer. And you can sense the thrill of this, this binding partnership of the aged Paul and this young man Demas. In another epistle he says, as it were in undertones, demon has forsaken me.

Having loved this present world, and he's gone to Thessalonica. Writing to the Galatians, Paul says to quote the NIV, you were running a good race. You started out, it seemed as if everything in the garden was lovely.

Who caught in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? You never really obeyed it, though you professed, but it was all superficial. My friend, how far has the word of God got into your soul and mine, and how far is it getting in this morning? I'm through with this. James Smitham used a wide-margined Bible, as many of you do, I'm sure.

Here and there he illustrated some text or other with a little picture, because Smitham was an artist, he was an American. Not that all Americans are artists, but he was an artist and he was an American. Now, he came to that passage in John describing the betrayal of our Lord by Judas Iscariot, and he pondered over it and prayed about it, pondered and prayed, pondered and prayed, and ultimately he got out his pencils and he made an etching.

How would you represent Judas at that point? Like Dante, a foul, miserable character in the corners of hell? Smitham did not. Do you know how he represented Judas Iscariot? He drew the form of a beautiful little baby boy in a crib, and you could see the sparkling eyes and you could see the smile, and he put under it, lest there be any mistake, Judas Iscariot. You say, that's crazy, why should he do that? What's he saying? I'll tell you what he's saying, he's saying this.

Judas shared in our common human nature. He was no different species from you or from me. He was originally no coarser or more evil than any of us here today, but the thing that made him a traitor more than anything else was this, the seed of Christ's word only got into the thin superficial layer and never broke the rock beneath.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of his Lord, and in that law does he meditate day and night. And you see, the characteristic of meditation is this, you're letting the word feed you. You're

feeding upon it, you're eating it, you're devouring it, it's getting into you, and its nourishment is going down into the depths and it transforms you.

Let the word of God, says Paul to the Colossians, dwell in you richly. There was a little chorus we used to sing in my young Christian days, spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Then these words followed, break me.

Have you ever prayed that? Men and women, I speak to you with all solemnity and sincerity this morning. Have you ever been broken? Has that deep resistance to the incursions of the word of God into the depths of your soul, has the underlying rock been broken? Ask God to start the process today, for it is a very precarious business indeed to pretend that I am a man or a woman of God, when it's all superficial. God save us by his grace and to his glory.

Let us pray. Oh Lord our God and our Father, in Jesus' name, we simply pray after being meditating upon this word, ride on, ride on in majesty, to rule in every corner of our lives, so that in our conscious mind and in the unconscious depths, your mind and your word and your spirit may have free play, that we may be transformed and changed from one degree of glory to another, as into the image of the word become flesh. We ask it in his name.

Amen.

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