

Guest Preacher - Rev. RJ Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

- [0 : 01] Seeking the Lord's help and blessing, let us turn back to the portion of Scripture that we read in the New Testament and the Gospel according to Mark and chapter 4.
- And we can read again verse 3. Listen, a sower went out to sow. Here we read that by the shore of the Sea of Galilee that he began again to preach as he had previously done.
- But there was such a large crowd that he stepped into a boat which was then rowed out a little distance from the shore and he began to teach.
- Jesus, during his earthly minister, believed in regularity of worship. For we read that his custom was, as we noted this morning, that he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and that there he would worship with the people.
- Chapter 1 we read that they went into Capernaum and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And this was his practice. Wherever he was on the Sabbath day, he would go to the synagogue and there worship with the people.
- [1 : 26] But this regularity did not prevent Jesus from spreading the good news whenever an opportunity came before him. He did not limit himself to the synagogue.
- But at every turn of opportunity he would speak to the crowd. So we find him sometimes teaching from a mountain. We find him teaching in homes, in the desert, when a group had gathered in a cemetery and even here from a boat.
- Here he is setting an example for us to use every opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Not to confine ourselves to a Sabbath day. Not to confine ourselves to a church building. In order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.
- He never selected his audience. He proclaimed the gospel news to all. He spoke to anyone who was willing to listen. And Mark informs us that he taught them many things by parables.
- [2 : 40] Now the telling of parables formed an important part in the teaching of Jesus. And to this day his parables are all very well known.
- By using this method of teaching in parables. And using things in the parables that were well known to the people.
- By this method he caught the attention of all the people. He caught the attention of the listener. Even in the synagogue there were things that could distract.
- But especially in the open air at this time when they were in a boat. There were many things around them that could distract them. So Jesus knew that the way to keep the attention of the people were to tell a story of something that was familiar to them.
- The people of Jesus day would have been familiar with parables. There are parables in the Old Testament in the scriptures that they had. There are parables in the Old Testament.
- [3 : 49] And the rabbis used this kind of method in their own writings and teachings. So he's using a method with which the people that are around him would be very much familiar with.

But this method of using parables, Jesus stimulated his hearers to think about spiritual things. He took what was in nature.

He took natural things. But they were all pointing to spiritual things. You will be perhaps familiar with the old definition of what is a parable.

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. What Jesus was doing by using parables was he was trying to make the people think for themselves.

He didn't want the people just to be passive listeners, but to be active listeners. As James exhorts us in his letter, he says, Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

[5 : 02] He didn't want to take away the responsibility from the people. But he has encouraged them to think about spiritual things.

To think about their own relationship with God. Their own standing before God. He's wanting them to be mindful that there is a problem that needs to be sorted out.

That problem is our relationship with God. A relationship that was broken by sin. So that by nature we are under the wrath of God.

And he wanted his hearers to think about those things. So Jesus used this method of parables. So effectively not only to illustrate and clarify truth.

But also to capture the imagination. And to direct the will. And lead people to obedience. Now the first parable that Mark presents to us is that what we find here of a sower.

[6 : 14] Which we also have in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark records for us that when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

In addition to the twelve known as the disciples, there were others also present who belonged to the wider circle of Christ's followers.

And the question Jesus regarding parables. They wanted to know two things. Why he was using parables. And what was the meaning of the parable of the sower.

Mark delivers the parable here in verse 1 to 9. And then in verse 10 to 12.

There he explains the purpose of parables. And then he turns to explain the parable of the sower.

[7 : 16] Which is given in verse 13 to 20. Now of all the parables spoken by the Lord, probably this is the one, the best known one.

And it is interesting not only because our Lord gives the parable to us, but he does something else. He explains the parable to us.

He gives us its interpretation. And our Lord often borrowed his comparisons from easy and familiar things, as we have already noted.

Such as we have here, where we have the sower. Where we have seed and soil. And by such easy and simple comparisons, he gives to the people spiritual instructions.

There are many key terms appearing throughout the chapter. For instance, the word sowing appears ten times and is defined as sowing the word.

[8 : 18] Seed appears and is referred to around eleven times. And soil is referred to about six times. But the most important is the verb that we have here.

And that is the verb to hear. Which occurs many times. And here we find many times throughout this chapter.

Where he says, listen. Listen. A sower went out to sow. Or hear. A sower went out to sow. Verse nine again.

He says, who has ears to hear? Let him hear. So that we can say that the idea of hearing or listening is the key word in the interpretation of this parable.

It reminds us that each person who is represented here. And here we have four different soil. Four different people hearing the word.

[9 : 23] But the response is different. And so it is. Spiritually in a congregation. Many hear the word.

But react differently to the word. As we find he had brought before us in this parable. Who is then the sower?

Listen. A sower went out to sow. Well, who is the sower? In general, all mankind are sowers. For Paul reminds us in his letter to the Galatians.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that he also will reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.

But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. So there is a sense which, in general, everyone is sowing.

[10 : 27] You're sowing and I'm sowing. Some are sowing to the flesh. Some are sowing to the Spirit. And there is also no doubt that the preacher of the gospel is a sower.

He spreads the seed of the word of God. But there is also a sense in which every believer is a sower. Every Christian is a sower.

The preacher sows the seed in his teaching capacity. But every believer sows the seed in their conduct and in their behavior and in their walk in life.

We have often heard the saying that the Christian is the Bible of the world. In me and you, the world weighs out Christianity.

In me and you, the way that we walk, the way that we conduct ourselves, the way that we behave, our own behavior, weighs out Christianity.

[11 : 34] So what do we sow? That is the great question. What do we sow? How does the world look upon my behavior? How does the world look upon my conduct and my walk?

What do I sow? You notice that in this parable there is emphasis laid on the fact that a single sower went out to sow.

There is a sense in which we are all individual sowers. We are all going to be individually accountable for the way in which we sowed the seed of the word in our conduct and in our walk and in our behavior.

The preacher is going to be accountable for the way in which we sowed the seed of the word. How important is the word?

How important is the sowing? Well, when we see bread on the table, there would be no such thing if the sower had not gone out to sow.

[12 : 38] And as that is true in the natural world, so it is also true in the spiritual world. We all need to go out as individuals to sow.

Eternity will one day testify all that results from my and from your sowing. Brands plucked from the burning, lamps lit by the Holy Spirit, people saved into everlasting salvation.

Who knows what may follow from our efforts? Life and death, heaven and hell depend upon the sowing of the good seed of the gospel.

So it must be the most important event that can ever happen. It is an important thing for the sower to go out to sow.

Here we are simply told that a sower went forth to sow. We do not know anything at all about him except that he was a sower.

[13 : 40] His individuality seems to be swallowed up in his task as a sower. In a sense, he has lost his personal, individual identity in his task.

His identity is now as a sower. He has become for all a sower and nothing but a sower. How good that would be for me and you if in this world we were to be identified simply as the source of the gospel.

As the source of the gospel. Maybe at times we feel discouraged. We may not have so big a hand as other sowers have and cannot sow quite as much at a time.

Nevertheless, go and sow with your smaller hand. Because there is a verse in Ecclesiastes which I always find to be an encouragement to me.

An encouragement to all sowers of the word. So all sowers of the gospel. And the verse goes like this. He who observes the wind will not sow.

[14 : 54] And he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the way the Spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child. So you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

In the morning sow your seed. And at evening withhold not your hand. For you know not what will prosper. For you know not what will prosper. This or that. Or whether both alike will be good.

So there are many things to discourage the Christian from witnessing in the world. There is very much many things in the world that would discourage us from being sowers of the gospel.

Sowers of the seed of the word of God. But here we are encouraged. In the morning sow your seed. And in the evening withhold not your hand.

Well what seed do we have? We have the good seed of the kingdom of God. We have the word of God. That's the seed that we have.

[15 : 59] The word of God. In Hebrews 4 we read. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword. Pushing to the division of soul and of spirit.

Of joints and of marrow. And discerning the thoughts and the intents of the heart. What is the significance there of the two-edged sword? Well the Romans used short double-edged swords.

Because they are smaller and lighter. It is easier for a soldier to carry for a long distance. And easier to handle and maneuver in a battle.

And if you start looking you'll find this phrase for instance. When the apostle John received his vision of Jesus on the island of Patmos. There he says in his right hand he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. Notice that this two-edged sword came out of the mouth of Jesus.

[17 : 03] Why would Jesus have a sword in his mouth? Shouldn't the sword have been in his hand? Well this is reference here is to the words of Jesus.

It's a reference to the words of Jesus. The word of God. Pushing to the division of soul and of spirit. Of joints and of marrow.

And discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The word of God. Searching out a person. The emphasis is on the fact that a two-edged sword is sharp.

But in comparison God's word is even sharper. That's what the writer to the Hebrews brings before us.

The word can be a light. Which shines on the road that a man to walk on. So that one may see the path.

- [18 : 01] And that one may see any danger which may be in his path. He who makes the word of God his guide. And marks its beginning. Is a person who is in the right way.
- So the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. And the word of God is a light.
- And if we use the word of God as a light. We can clearly see the path that we should walk upon. That person will be able to mark the road in which he ought to go. And to avoid all those by-paths which may lead him astray.
- He will see where those by-roads turn off from the main road. He will see any obstruction which may line his path. He may see any cliff which may be near.
- And on a dark night wherein he might fall. The light to be a path for us.
- [19 : 06] It shows us how to follow the right. And avoid the wrong way. That's what the word of God does. Shows us how to follow the right. And avoid the wrong way.
- And I and you need such a guide. And the word of God is such a guide. That is why the sower must sow. He must go and sow the seed of the word of God.
- And where did he sow? Well, he sowed in the open field. He sowed in different soils. He did not keep the seed to himself.
- And we are not to keep the word of God to ourselves. He did not keep the seed to himself. But scattered it far and wide. His object was a very limited one.
- He did not go out to make the seed grow. For that was beyond his power. He simply went out to sow. Our responsibility is to sow the seed.
- [20 : 14] To sow the seed. We can't make it grow. And later on in this chapter that is brought before us. We cannot make it grow.
- Our responsibility is to sow the seed of the word of God. Now, we know that not everyone is going to receive the seed with open arms.
- Not everyone is going to receive the gospel with open arms. The same sun that melts the ice also bakes clay as hard as breaks.
- Nevertheless, the sower must go forth with expectation. The preacher must always preach with expectation.
- His responsibility is to sow the seed of the word of God. The power to make that seed grow is beyond him.
- [21 : 14] We must go forth with expectation. Sometimes people respond to the gospel as passengers respond to the instructions before they take off from the airport.
- Or from the port on which case, what to do in the case of emergency. You know that when you go on an airline or when you go on the ferry. You always receive instructions as what to do in the case of emergency.
- We are invited to listen. But if we're going to tell the truth, mostly we ignore the instructions. We are preoccupied in conversations.
- Or reading or staring out the window. Or perhaps even dosing off while the instructions have been voiced out. The announcement is dealing with life and death issues.
- And yet, we ignore them. No company would allow the messages to be skipped simply because no one seems to bother or listen.
- [22 : 24] Calmac does not just skip the message on the ferry just because they know that 99% of its passengers aren't listening to the instructions.
- The same at the airport and on the plane. They always give the instructions. Even although they know that people are not really listening to those instructions.

Yet, they would not allow the message to be skipped. Simply because no one seems to bother or listen to them. And so, with the seed of the gospel, the preaching of the gospel, we must not skip to sow the word.

Simply because people can't be bothered to listen to it. We cannot skip sowing the word. Although we know that perhaps the majority will not listen to it.

The word may not be received. But it still remains just as powerful. Well, here we are told that some of the seed fell by the wayside.

[23 : 33] And those who hear the word, especially the preaching of the word, may be they pay no attention. They take no interest whatsoever in the word.

They take no interest whatsoever in the gospel. Sitting under the word, their mind is taken up with other things. That may be you tonight. Sitting under the word of God.

Sitting where the seed of the word of God has been preached, where it has been scattered out. And perhaps you're taking no interest whatsoever in what has been said.

Maybe your mind is taken up with other things. At the end, they go their own way.

Knowing no more than when they came into the hearing of the word. Is that a picture for yourself? Coming under the word and leaving this place, and you are not any better off than you were when you came in.

[24 : 43] In Hebrews chapter 4, we read, For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

Is that a description of yourself tonight? The word has come to you. But has the word benefited you? And maybe the answer is no.

It hasn't benefited me in any way. Why not? Because it was not united by faith. There were none the better for it.

And the reason was this, that you did not receive the word by faith. You did not receive the good news by faith.

You see, we must remember that the mere hearing of the word is not enough.

[25 : 49] To profit, it must be believed. To profit, it must be believed. Just as we noted this morning.

As we noted this morning, you must believe. That is our responsibility. Our responsibility is to believe, to commit ourselves, to trust in Jesus Christ.

That's our responsibility. The unwillingness to trust in Jesus is on our part. Jesus is very willing to take you. To take you as you are.

With all your sins, he is quite willing to take you. But the unwillingness is on your part to come to Jesus, to trust in Jesus, to commit yourself to Jesus.

Yes, the mere hearing of the gospel is not enough. To profit, it must be believed. There is no church where scores of them are not to be found.

[26 : 56] People who listen, but do not believe. Is that you? Sunday after Sunday, allowing the devil to snatch away the seed of the word.

Feeling nothing. Caring nothing. No interest in the gospel. No interest that Christ died on the cross at Golgotha. No interest that he rose again.

No interest that he is coming back again to judge. No interest whatsoever. And you are found under the gospel.

You are found where the seed of the word is being scattered. You are warned, you are invited, you are commanded to come and to put your trust in Christ.

And yet, you allow the devil to snatch any thoughts of doing such away. Your mind wanders. What am I going to do tomorrow? What will I do next week?

[27 : 57] Where am I going? You allow your mind to wander away. The devil snatching the seed of the word and leaving you feeling nothing, caring nothing, having no interest in the gospel or what has been said.

You know, my friend, many die in that state and they are lost forever. They are lost forever. Many a person who sat where you sit, where you're sitting, who had no interest in the gospel, died like that and they are lost forever.

You see, it is a very, very solemn thought, is it not? To go from the seat of the gospel to go to hell. Go from the seat of the gospel and to be lost forever.

To have heard the gospel and to be lost forever. We are told that some of the seed fell on stony ground and here we find that the seed made temporary impressions.

Those who take pleasure in hearing the gospel, sometimes even perhaps moved by the gospel, perhaps even moved to tears by the gospel. Now these people are not like the ones we've spoken of before.

[29 : 22] They are not careless or inattentive but sadly the old things have not passed away. The old things have not passed away and although some impression was made, it soon withered away.

You know, we know that there are some and on a Sabbath evening they will promise themselves, well, if I get to Monday I am going to think seriously of my relationship with God.

I am going to think seriously of how I stand before God. I am going to think seriously of making peace with God.

I am going to think seriously of becoming a Christian and putting my trust and committing myself to Christ after all that I heard. But on Monday things change.

You get up and you forget all your promises. You forget all your good intentions. You forget all that was said. Yes, it made a temporary impression upon you, but then it withered away.

[30 : 34] Are you one of them? Are you one of them? Then we're told that some of the seed fell on thorny ground and to a certain extent they even go as far as to obey the gospel.

Their conscience are affected by it. Their affections are stirred up and these people acknowledge that it is right, it is good, it is worthy.

They may adopt many of the habits that the gospel commends, but they stay short of full commitment. Something appears to chain them fast and they never get beyond a certain point.

Is that you tonight? Yes, you may have adopted some of the habits that the gospel commends. You reach a certain point, but you don't go beyond that point.

You are like the seed that brings no fruit to perfection. Remember the fig tree that Jesus saw on the way to Jerusalem.

[31 : 44] it had leaves and where there were leaves there should be figs. And this tree was full of leaves. It sort of outwardly made a profession that there should be fruit.

And when Jesus went up to the fig tree and put his hand in among the leaves, there was no fruit. No fruit whatsoever. And you know there may be people who have leaves, but they have no fruit.

No fruit. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust of other things occupy their minds. These are the people who are almost persuaded.

Almost persuaded. Remember the man who said to Paul, Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian.

you almost persuade me. And what did Paul reply? I would that you were not almost persuaded, but fully persuaded, fully committed to be a Christian.

[32 : 50] Maybe you're here tonight and that's where you're standing. Almost persuaded. Or maybe you remember times in your life where you were almost persuaded.

And yet tonight you are where you were, still outside of Christ, still outside of salvation. But then there was the fourth soil. Some of the seed fell into good ground.

Now I want you to notice the distinction on all the others. All the others the seed fell on, but into the good soil it fell into the soil.

The good seed fell on the wayside, on the thorny, among thorns, and among the stony ground. But it fell into the good soil.

What happened? Well, the word of God exposes the person's innermost being. The word makes us to discover who we truly are.

[33 : 58] We are depraved and hell-deserving sinners. that in us dwells no good things, that our lives have been spent contrary to the requirement and to the claims of God.

The word searches us out, and we see ourselves as lost, ruined, undone sinners. God's word can penetrate to the heart of a person and cause a change.

Remember Peter's preaching brought for us in Acts chapter 2. Now, when they heard this, the preaching of the word, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart.

Well, has the word of God ever cut you to the heart? Has the word of God ever gone into you in such a way that you come to see who you truly are in the sight of God, a sinner, a hell-deserving sinner?

Has the word of God pierced you? Has it penetrated as no word of man ever has into your innermost being? Has it exposed the workings of your wicked heart?

[35 : 15] Oh, the sword may be aware of hardened hearts. We spoke of that in the morning. The sword may be aware of hostile response. Perhaps that's your response tonight.

Perhaps you're hostile to what you're hearing, that anyone would dare say that you are a sinner. You know, there are people in this world, in this community, as in all our communities, who are very hostile to the preacher of the word who claims that they are sinners, that they are sinners.

But in spite of being aware of hardened hearts, hostile response, coldness, and indifference among the hearers, in this parable, the sower lost his crop three times, yet he must continue to sow the seed, and in the end he reaps a great harvest.

So we must continue to sow the seed of the word, convinced of the inner power, of the inherent power of God's word, that it shall not return to him empty.

God's word will never return to him empty. It will accomplish that for which it has been sent forth. Well, this parable ends with the good news.

[36 : 29] The good news that a great harvest was brought forth, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

The parable tells us there are three ways of hearing the word of God without profit, and only one way of hearing the word of God aright.

There is only one mark of being a right-hearted hearer, and that is to bear fruit. What is that fruit? That fruit is visible repentance.

Visible repentance. Visible faith or trust or commitment to Christ, and a visible holiness of life.

Well, what class of hearers are you wanting tonight? We spoke of four kinds of hearers. What kind are you tonight? Are you like the seed that fell on the wayside, or on the stony ground, or that fell among thorns, or like the seed that fell into good soil?

[37 : 45] Has the word of God searched you out tonight? Has it searched your heart out tonight? Do you see yourself as you truly are, a sinner, hopeless and helpless, as a sinner needing Jesus Christ, as a sinner needing salvation, as a sinner who is willing to commit yourself to Jesus Christ tonight?

The parable ends, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. Well, how did you hear tonight? What effect has the word of God had upon you tonight?

If you are still Christless, if you are still outside the salvation of God, if you came here into the church tonight, outside the salvation of God, heard the word, heard the word of invitation and command from Christ, and yet you leave with a testimony, I have not been fully persuaded.

I am leaving as I came in. I came in without Christ, and I am leaving, without Christ. I came in as a hell-deserving sinner, and I am leaving as a hell-deserving sinner.

What a testimony that is, my friend. What a solemn testimony that is to have, leaving the place of worship tonight, where you have been invited to come to Christ, where you have been commanded to come to Christ, where Christ has made it known to you that he is willing to take you, to take you as you are.

[39 : 35] The unwillingness being on your part. The words of James should be heeded. Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves, for if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like, but the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty and persevere, be no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

In Mark here we're told, really what Mark is telling us is this, pay attention to what you hear and to how you hear.

pay attention to how you respond to what you hear. Take care how you hear. You know, it is important for us that we take heed to the way that we hear.

Will you not at least believe the true words of Jesus Christ? There may be many perplexing thoughts going through your mind tonight about the Christian life.

Maybe the evidence around you is not very persuasive, for you, but the least you could do and the more honourable thing you could do is to believe and trust and lean on the true words of Jesus Christ, who has said that he is willing to accept you.

[41 : 16] He is willing to accept you. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

How do you hear? How do you respond to the word of God? And my friend, in leaving you, I just want to remind you that the way that you respond to Jesus Christ, that it determines your eternal destiny.

destiny. There's only two destinies, heaven and hell. And it is the way that you respond to Jesus Christ will determine where you spend eternity, whether in heaven or whether in hell.

That's how solemn it is. That's how solemn the whole matter is. We're not going to try and water it down.

That's the stark reality. Heaven and hell. And it all depends upon our response to Jesus Christ, the only one through whom we can be reconciled to God and have peace with God.

[42 : 30] There is no other way but Jesus Christ. Then surely, surely it would be wise for us to make sure that we are in Christ, committing ourselves to Christ, trusting, in Christ, being assured that we have been reconciled to God in Christ, so that we are at peace with God.

Take heed how you hear and take heed as to how you respond to the word of God. May the Lord bless our thoughts.

Let us pray. Eternal Lord, we pray that thou would impress upon us the solemnity of our gathering here tonight, to be found under thy word, to be found where the seed of the word is being scattered.

And we pray, O Lord, that the seed may have found its way into good soil, that it may have penetrated our hearts, brought to light who we truly are, and given us the light of the great provision that thou has made for sinners such as we are, in thy Son, Jesus Christ.

We pray, O Lord, that we would bring forth fruit to the glory of thine own name. We ask, O Lord, that thou would continue with us during the coming days, and forgive us for all our sins.

[43 : 57] In Jesus' name, amen. We shall conclude by singing to the Lord's praise from Psalm 126 on page 419.

Psalm 126 on page 419. When signs bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

They among the heathens said, The Lord, great things for them hath wrought. The Lord hath done great things for us, which joy to us is brought. As streams of water in the south, our bondage Lord we call, who sow in tears a reaping time, of joy and joy they shall.

That man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing shall return. We shall sing the whole psalm to the Lord's praise.

Psalm 126 on page 419. When signs bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we. When signs bondage God turned back, as men are thrilled where we, then filled with laughter was the mouth, our tongue with melody.

[45 : 25] Thee among the heathens, saith the Lord, great things for them hath brought.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought.

As streams of water and the south our bondage Lord we come, this song and tear shall weep in time of joy and joy they shall.

That man who return will in precious sea, in good fort that morn, eternally springing packages, rejoicing shall return.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more.

[47 : 01] Amen.