

A Parable for the Bible Belt

Luke 8:1-15

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, December 27, 2020

Well, good morning and welcome to another Sunday morning service or Sunday morning sermon here at our Grace Fellowship YouTube channel. It is so good to see you here with us today. And before we get started in our sermon for today, I just want to say a special thank you again to all those who were involved in our Christmas Eve service this year, our Christmas Eve program with the kids. I already said that at the program itself, but I just want to say it again, here. Because as you know, this has been a difficult year for a lot of people. It's been tough with all the different things going on. So, it was a real blessing to end on that note, wasn't it? It was a real blessing to end on something positive, on something good, by seeing the children tell us the Christmas story. And I might add that we had a lot of participation in that. We had a lot of families involved, more than a dozen or so. And they recorded the videos, and they played the different roles, and they made the illustrations and we just really appreciate it. Thank you so much for all your hard work that you put into that. Thank you also for the volunteers who coordinated it as well.

God has sent His Son into the world, hasn't He? A Savior has come for us, which is something we all need to be proclaiming right now. It's something we all need to be reminded of because if the world ever needed a Savior, it's right now. If the world ever needed help it is today at this moment, because it's never felt so dark before. People tell us that we live in an age of progress. They tell us we live in an age of light. But it doesn't feel like that, does it? It doesn't feel very encouraging. It feels dark. It feels hopeless. But the good news is that it's not. I mean, the good news is that this world is not hopeless because God has sent us salvation, He has sent us the Savior in our Lord Jesus Christ. And it was such a blessing to hear that from the mouths of babes and infants of this past Christmas. So, thank you so much for all those who put that together. Just so you know that video is still available online, if you didn't get a chance to watch it. You can go on to our YouTube channel, and you can see it there. And you will be tremendously encouraged by that.

And with that said, while you may not be aware of it, today is our last Sunday of the year. Today is the last Sunday of 2020. Which is a relief to some of you, I'm sure. I'm sure that's a consolation, because you can't wait for this year to be over. You can't wait for it to end, but it's been such a tough, miserable year for you. But you know, I read somewhere this week that after this year, no one will ever say that "hindsight is 2020" again. No one will ever brag on that number. This year has ruined it for us all; it's been difficult, but whatever the case, it's almost over, which means it's a good time to talk about our vision as a church. This is a good Sunday to talk about our vision statement here at Grace Fellowship Chilliwack.

Some of you will remember when I was at the Grace Advance Academy several years ago, they asked us to write a vision statement for our church, a mission statement that talked about who we are, where we're going, what we're trying to do as a congregation. And since we're starting the new year, I thought it'd be a good time to remind you of that. So, let me read to you the opening paragraph of our vision statement. It says this, it says, "It is our vision, to proclaim grace upon grace to Chilliwack, British Columbia and to the ends of the earth".

John one verses 16 through 17 says,

For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

At Grace Fellowship, we believe that salvation is all of grace and not of works. We believe it is something that God alone accomplishes in our lives and nothing we contribute to ourselves. We believe it is unmerited favor

where Jesus earned the father's approval, and in His mercy gives us the benefits of that through His shed blood on the cross and victorious resurrection from the tomb. Since we've all received this, it is our vision as a church to proclaim grace upon grace, in several ways. And these are all on the website, by the way, if you'd like to see them. They're all online. But here are some ways that we proclaim grace as a church.

We proclaim grace upon grace through the Bible. We do it through Scripture, and we proclaim grace through worship and evangelism in service. We proclaim God's grace through counseling and leadership. And then finally, the last point on our vision statement is we proclaim grace upon grace, through equipping the saints. We do it through preparing people for the work of the ministry. But this is our vision as a church. This is what we're trying to do. We want to proclaim God's grace to people. We want to tell them that salvation is all of God and not of us. This is all His doing. This is all His work; He alone gets the glory.

I was talking to someone the other day about their family. They were having conflict with their siblings and different issues going on, which is normal at Christmas time and then it often happens during the holidays. Because they were lost, their family didn't know the Lord, and so I asked this person, I said, "Well, how did God save you?" "How did God bring you to Christ?" And he said, "By grace, the Lord saved me by grace." And I said, "Well, then you can be gracious to them." "Then you can show God's grace to them." "You can treat them the same way God treated you." "You didn't earn your salvation, you didn't earn God's favor, so don't make them earn yours." But it all goes back to that, doesn't it? It all goes back to the grace of God. That's what we do as a church. That's what we tell people, we want to make this known, no matter whether it's with our Christmas Eve program, or attributes of God class, or our Sunday morning sermons, we want to tell people that salvation is all of God. It's all of His mercy. Whether it's with our children's ministry, our men's ministry, or women's ministry, we want to tell them, it's all of grace, which means that we place a high priority on listening as a church. We place a high priority on hearing the Word of God because you can't proclaim God's grace if you don't do that, can you? You can't proclaim God's grace if nobody listens. And so, this is another part of this vision statement. That's the other side of the coin here. On the one hand, we want to proclaim God's grace to people, we want to preach it and teach it and make it known. But on the other hand, we encourage people to listen to it. We encourage people to take it in, soak it in to their hearts which leads me to what I want to talk to you about this morning.

So, if you would, please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke. That's the book we're in this morning. That's what we're going to be looking at. Please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke and we're going to be in chapter eight. We're going to be in Luke chapter eight, for today. And as you're turning there this morning, in honor of the new year, since this is the last Sunday of 2020, I want to take some time to talk to you about an important issue that's facing our church today; it's facing our world, and that is the need to listen to the Word of God; that's the need to hear it. Because I would say, if our world is failing at anything today, if the church is failing at anything today, not just our church, but any church, it's this: We simply don't listen like we should. We simply don't hear what God wants to say to us because we're so distracted by other things. Our mind is so caught up in something else. And to address that, we're going to look at Luke chapter eight, which I'm going to read you before we get started. So, if you would read Luke chapter eight, starting in verse one.

Here it says,

Soon afterwards, Jesus began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve are with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: [And the Lord said this] "So the sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the

air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.” As He said these things He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. And Jesus said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.

“Now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”

We'll stop the reading there at verse 15. Just to say a few words about this, I've entitled our sermon for today "A Parable for the Bible Belt". And I don't normally tell you that, I don't normally tell you the title of the sermon. But I'm doing that here, because that's where we live. This is where we're at in BC, we live in the bible belt. We live in one of the most religious parts of the country. According to the latest count, from what I've heard, there is something like 60 different churches in Chilliwack. And that comes to about one church for every four kilometers in town. It's one church for every two and a half square miles, which is staggering to think about, because that's a lot of churches. I mean, that's a lot of religion in one town. In fact, some have even said that at one time, Chilliwack was the most churched city in Canada. At one time, it had more churches per capita/person than any other place in the nation. And one problem you always face in a town like this one, is the problem of listening. One problem you always face in an environment like the Bible Belt; I grew up in the Bible Belt, so I can relate to this Bible Belt in the States, where I grew up. One problem you always find in that environment is the problem of hearing. Because people think they know it all already, right? People think they've heard it all before. So, what could you possibly tell them? And what could you possibly show them that they don't already know. That's the mentality here.

And I mentioned this because this is nothing new in history. It's nothing new in the world. Because it's the same thing Jesus faced in his day, this is the same thing He faced in the passage I just read to you. Because if you notice, in verse four of what we just read, it says Jesus told this story when a large crowd was coming together, that means a large crowd of Jews. It means a large crowd of religious people in the Bible Belt. They didn't call it the Bible Belt back then. But with all the synagogues and temples and places where they met, it was the same type of environment. And they thought they knew it all already. They thought they'd heard it all before. So, they were wondering, what could Jesus possibly teach me? What could He possibly tell me?

And the text says in light of that Jesus said this, He told them this: It says, "The sower went out to sow his seed". That sounds kind of odd when you read it, it sounds a little strange. But just to give you the context for this, Matthew 13 says, Jesus taught this parable on a boat. It says that He taught this from a fishing vessel out in the Sea of Galilee, because the crowd was so large, it was so big. I mean, so many people were coming to hear Him that they were about to crush Him. They were about to trample Him with the amount of them, so He went out on the water on a boat. And as He did that, presumably a sower passed by. The sower is just another word for a farmer. So, a farmer passed by, because the Sea of Galilee was surrounded by farmland on all sides. It was surrounded by steep cliffs and steep hills where there was plenty of good, solid soil to grow crops in and as Jesus preached, we saw one of these guys doing his work. And He said this, He told them the following parable, which I'll tell you about in a moment; I'll explain the parable to you. But verse four calls it a parable or a parabolos in

Greek, which means a story with a deeper meaning. It means a story with a hidden meaning behind it. In other words, this is not just a story to Jesus. It's not just a tale that He made up to entertain you. He's trying to tell you something here. He's trying to give you some some instruction. And the point is found in verse eight. If you look down in verse 8, this is what this parable is all about. It says, "As He said these things He would call out, he who has ears to hear, let him hear." The way this is worded in Greek it means that Jesus was doing this constantly during the parable. He was doing this over and over again to say, "You need to listen". "He who has ears to hear, let him hear", said it over and over and over again. Why? Because the people weren't doing that. He said that because the people were not listening to Him.

The greatest teacher who had ever lived was among them. The greatest Rabbi the Jews would ever know was in their midst. This was the Messiah. This was the Son of God. This was the long awaited One of Israel, and they were blowing Him off. They weren't paying attention because they were too distracted. They had too many other things on their minds. Sounds like modern times, doesn't it? Sounds like it is today. I mean, today we've got the Coronavirus, but back then they had the Roman Empire to deal with. And they had all the Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians and all the strife and all that mess going on. So, they were distracted. Their minds were far off from what He was saying.

To explain this a little more, the parable here; verse 11, says that the seed is the Word of God. It's the Bible. And the sower is anyone who spreads it. The sower, the farmer, is anyone who teaches the Bible to you; his identity doesn't matter, who it is, doesn't matter, because the point of the parable is you need to listen to it. Whoever teaches the Bible to you, whoever gives it to you, you need to hear it. That's the point of what Jesus is saying here. You need to be the right kind of soil; you need the right kind of ground for this to settle into. And this is so important for us. This is such a big deal for our congregation. And I would say for any congregation right now. Because like I just said: this world, these things, have been so crazy lately, haven't they? Things have been so distracting that it's been hard to hear the Word of God. It's been hard to listen to what God is trying to say to us, because we have so many things on our mind today. We have so many things grasping for our attention.

Seems like every other day, we're waiting for another big announcement from the government to come down. Seems like every other day, there's another new law being passed or new ordinance or new something, that it's hard to follow them. It's hard to keep up with them. And as soon as it's passed, as soon as the laws come out, you see a hundred different people arguing with it. You go on Facebook or social media, and it's just blog after blog, article after article, disagreeing with it, debating with it. It's controversy, conflict after conflict. And if you're not careful, it can make you forget what you're here to do as a church. If you're not careful, it can make you forget what you are here to do as a Christian. You are here to listen to the Word of God. You're here to pay attention to what the Word says to you. Jesus was saying this to people that were in the same state we're in. He was saying this to people that were in a really hard time. He said you need to see and hear and be the right kind of soil. You don't have to keep up with all the latest studies on the Coronavirus. You don't have to keep up with all the latest rules and laws that are passed. You need to follow some of that. But your greatest focus as a Christian is the Word of God. Your greatest focus is the gospel. It needs to go in and out of you. It needs to go into your heart, into your mind, into your soul, and then out of your mouth for all to hear. It's a constant process for us as a church; in and out.

In John 10, verse 27, just to give you some passages on this, in John 10, verse 27, Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me". And that means there's a very simple way to tell if you're Jesus' sheep or not. There's a very simple way to tell if you're His disciple; you hear His voice. That's how you tell. That's how you know. You listen to it. You don't have to be a good person first. You don't have to do a bunch of works first. You don't have to keep a bunch of rules; keep a bunch of commandments. You just need to listen to His voice. And you need to listen only to His voice, He says in John 10. You don't need to listen to the voice of strangers. Only His voice. Romans 10, verse 17 says, "So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ". So now Paul says, this is how you have faith. This is how you're saved. You're saved by hearing the

Word. That's where faith begins. That's where salvation begins. It begins in your ears. It begins in what you listen to, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

This morning, if you're taking notes, in Luke chapter eight, we're going to look at four types of people who hear the Word of God. That's our outline for today. That's what we're talking about; four types of people who hear the Word of God. And we're going to do this because everyone doesn't listen the same way, do they? Everyone doesn't hear the same way. I don't think I have to tell you that, you know that. But some do, and some don't. Some listen, some hear the Word of God; they take it in, they receive it. They apply it to their lives; they live it out. And others don't. Others ignore the Word. Others blow it off. Others push it to the side because they have too many other things on their mind. And the question Jesus asks here is, "Which one are you?" The thing He wants to know in this parable is what type of soil are you? As you read this sermon from Jesus; as you take it in, He wants to know where do you see yourself in here? Where do you fit in this story? My friends, this is serious stuff. It's very important. But this is how you get into heaven. That's why we're focusing on this at the end of the year here. This is how you meet God in glory: You have to listen.

And let's talk about that this morning, with four types of people who hear the Word of God. The first one is the careless hearer. The first type of person who hears the Word of God is the careless hearer, which means that some people don't hear God's Word, because they don't care. They don't hear it, or maybe they hear it, and they don't take it in, because they have no interest in it. They come to church to sit among us, but it means nothing to them. It has no practical bearing in their life. And if you read in verses four through five, this is where we read about this group of people. Luke eight, verse four, says, "When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable and He said, 'The sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air ate it up.'"

Just to say a few words about this; as you read this parable, it may sound strange to you, it may sound a little odd because we don't have farmers who do this today. We don't have too many men who scatter their seed by the roadside like this guy did. But this was a very common thing in the ancient world. You saw it all the time because this was the days before modern machinery. This was the days before inventions like the combine and the tractor, so that when a farmer planted his seed, it was a very sloppy process. When a sower would scatter his seed, it was very messy. It's very interesting to drive around the farmland here in Chilliwack. We have beautiful farms, don't we? I mean, the farms as you're driving around, they're so orderly. They're so nice and clean and neat. It was totally the opposite in the first century. Farms were about as far away from that as it could be. Because what the farmer would do is, he would go along and throw his seed everywhere. He would scatter it in every conceivable direction.

One commentator described it this way when he said, "Fields in first century Israel were long, narrow strips, marked off and surrounded by footpaths. So, in order to plant his seed, the sower used a broadcasting method taking one handful of seed at a time and flinging it over a wide swath. This arc of dispersal might have looked indiscriminate, but the method had the advantage of covering large areas of ground with every single throw." And I don't think I could explain it better than that, but the farms were much smaller back then. They covered much smaller areas of territory. And what Jesus is describing here is the ancient practice of walking along, taking a bag of seed, draping it across one shoulder, and with the other arm just flinging the seed everywhere as you walked. Just scattering it all over the place, like a lot of people do when they feed their chickens. Like you see people do when they feed their hens. That was how they farmed in the ancient world. That was how they did it. So that if something seed fell in the wrong place. That was fine if some seed fell in strange places that was expected, which is part of the deal. And Jesus said, as this farmer did that some fell by the road, or the roadside in some of your translations. It doesn't mean a concrete road or a paved road, it means a means a dirt road, a dirt path. A kind that was found all throughout the land of Israel as a long, long stretch of ground that became as hard as concrete because of the pounding of people's feet, because of the beating of their sandals.

And the Lord here says this is very fitting because this is the way some people are with the gospel. This is the way some people are with the Word of God; their heart is so hard. It's so tough, that it's like a concrete road. It's like a dirt road. Everything just bounces off of it. Everything just falls off like a brick because it's been pounded and pounded and pounded with sin. It's been beaten and beaten and beaten with evil thoughts and evil desires and evil intentions of the heart to the point that these people are just callous to it. They don't feel anything at all. They don't feel joy when they hear the Word. They don't feel sorrow when they hear the Word. They don't feel conviction. They don't feel peace. They don't feel guilt. They don't feel anything. Anything.

You guys know what this is like. But these are the people in the church that you preach your guts out to. You pour your heart out to sermon after sermon after sermon. And afterwards, all they want to talk to you about is hockey. Afterwards, they come up and all they want to talk about is the latest game they saw on TV because it doesn't mean anything to them. The preaching has no impact. They're the kind of people that you counsel, you pray with them, you plead with them, you beg with them to turn from their sin, turn from their lust, turn from their pride. And afterwards, all they want to talk to you about is politics. Afterwards, all they want to talk to you about is the latest thing Justin Trudeau did. Because they don't feel anything for God. Their soul has been pounded to death, beaten to death with sin.

And as a result of this, verse five says the seed that fell on this soil was trampled underfoot; horrible thing, trampled underfoot. And the birds of the air ate it up. It's a very fitting illustration for this, as we all know, this is very appropriate because birds love to do this, don't they? They love to eat seeds. You want to find a bird or attract a bird, just scatter some seed on the ground and in a few minutes, you'll have hundreds of them. And that's what happened to this group of people. They just flew away with the wind. They scattered in every conceivable direction, or even worse, they got trampled upon. It means the world stepped all over them. So many people leave the church, and they think they're going to have it better out in the world. That's not the case here. If you want to know what this refers to, if you want to know specifically what this means, later on in the passage, verse 12 says, that this group of people or the birds represent the devil who comes and takes the Word from their heart so that they will not believe and be saved. And that's a shocking thing to read here. It's very alarming, because this is the only time that the devil is mentioned in this passage. This is the only time he shows up and it's with this group of people; it's with this type of soil. And the idea here is the devil could do this because the Word had never taken root. It had never sunk down below the surface; it stayed on top of the ground. So, all he had to do was bend over and pick it up. No effort at all. All he had to do was reach down and grab it, because their heart was so hard. It never penetrated it anyway. They didn't care about it anyway.

And that leads to a couple of applications here. It leads to several ways you could apply this to your lives. For one thing, this means it is possible; now hear this; it is possible to harden yourself to the Bible. You need to see that. This is very important stuff. But it is possible to harden yourself to the Word of God. Not someone else hardens you, you do it yourself. One pastor called this being gospel hardened or salvation hardened, where you hear, and you hear, and you hear the gospel, but you never take it in. Or you listen, and you listen, and you listen to the message of salvation over and over and over again and it does you no good because it just stays on top of the surface. It just sits on top of the ground, on top of your hard heart, so that going to church is boring to you; being with the people of God is a drag. It's like pulling teeth; you don't like it; you can't stand it. But you go anyway, out of habit and nothing more.

And I mention this because this is such a problem here. This is such an issue in the Bible Belt, because again, we have so many churches here, we have so many church going people. The Gospel hardness is like a disease among us. It's like a plague in our town. It's killed more Christians than anything else. It's killed more churches than anything else. And so, Jesus says here, you need to be careful that you don't become this way. You need to be careful that you don't find yourself in this type of soil. This is the most dangerous soil for a church going person. This is the most dangerous soil for a religious person because it's so common.

A story is told of the time the evangelist Charles Finney preached a revival in New York State during the 1800s, where he did an altar call and he asked people to come forward and get saved. And many of them did, many of them responded to his methods but several decades later, he was shocked to find when he came back to the town, that the people were worse off than they were in the beginning. They were worse off than they were when he first got there, to the point that when he tried to do a second revival, they wouldn't have it. When he tried to preach to them again, they literally ran him out of town. He said they were more drunk. They were more adulterous. They were more covetous than they were when I first met them. And as a result, he took to calling it the burned over district because he said they were burned over with the gospel. He called them the burned-out people because they were burned out on the Word of God. And my friends, let me remind you, it is possible to become that way, as a Christian, it is possible to become burned out on the Word of God; to become sick of it, become tired of it, to become worn out over it. So, you need to be careful you don't get that way. You need to be careful you don't find yourself becoming that way as a Christian.

It leads to another application to this; another way to apply this to our lives. And that is, and this is the scariest thing of all; it is possible to be this way in church. It is possible to harden yourself to the Word of God, in church. It's another frightening thing you read in this text. But not only is it possible to be hardened, but it's possible to do it here, in this place with other Christians.

If you remember the context for this, you know Jesus is preaching to Jews here. He's preaching to religious people who knew their Bible, they knew their old testament, they kept the laws, they kept the commandments, they went to the temple, they made the sacrifice, they did all of that stuff. And he says it doesn't mean anything because they don't listen. It doesn't mean anything because they don't pay attention to what it says. Their minds are elsewhere. They come to the temple like a ghost. They come like a zombie. Brains turned off, minds are shut down, hearts are totally gone. And what He says in this parable is that all of that left them worse off than they were to begin with. All of that left them worse off than they were at the start because it left them wide open to the devil.

In fact, if you want to know what a follower of Satan looks like, it is this. He goes to the temple; he goes to church. He is very faithful with that. He's very consistent, very devoted, and he never ever, ever listens to the Word of God. He never ever pays attention to it. That's what a follower of the devil looks like. A lot of people say, well, I'm not a follower of Satan. I don't kill anyone. I don't murder anybody. I haven't raped anybody or done these horrible things. Well, maybe you don't. But Jesus says, this puts you in the same camp as those who do. This put you in the same category. Because the devil will allow you to do anything but listen. The devil will allow his people to do anything but hear God's word. You know, this is important because I meet so many people who think that if I can just get my kids to come to church, it will help them, it will do them good. Jesus says, not if they do this, not if they don't listen. I meet other people who say, "If I can just get my lost loved ones to come to church, if I can just get my lost husband, or lost wife to show up here, it will do them good." And the Lord says, not if they come like this. If they come like this, it will make them no better off than a follower of the devil.

You need to come for the right reasons. You need to come to church with the right heart and motivation. And that is to hear the Word of God which leads to another point to consider this morning. It leads to another type of person who hears the Word of God. The first one is the careless hearer. The first type of person who hears the Word of God in this passage is the careless hearer, which means that some people don't hear God's Word, or they don't take it in because they just don't care about it. They have no interest in it; it means nothing to them. They come to church, sit among us. But they've totally checked out, in the things of God. And Jesus says, you don't want to do that. You don't want to find yourself in that category.

That leads to another point to consider this morning, another type of person who hears the Word of God. And that is the dry hearer and the distracted hearer. I'm putting these two together, but a second and a third type of person who hears the Word of God is the dry hearer and the distracted hearer, which means that some people hear the Word of God and they're dry to it. They hear the Word of God and they're not hardened to it; they're not callous to

it, but they are distracted. That's their greatest problem. That's their greatest weakness. They have their mind on too many other things. And if you look in verse four, Jesus talks about this group this way.

And it says,

When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out."

Now obviously, since the farms were laid out the way they were in Israel, since they were not as neat and tidy as our farms are today, there were several places the seed could fall upon, there were several types of soil that would land in and here Jesus gives us two more; the rocky soil and the thorny soil, we would call it the dry soil and the distracted soil.

And just to explain these to you; the rocky soil here, it doesn't refer to rocks that were found on the surface of the ground or on top of the ground, because no self-respecting farmer would leave his farm that way. We all know this, but after he would plow and till the earth, every farmer would pick the rocks up and throw them away on the ground. So, this is not referring to that here. This is referring to the rocks that were found beneath the surface. This is referring to rocks that were found a foot or so beneath the ground. Because after you plow and till the surface, you couldn't get to that. After you would prepare the top of the ground with all the work you had to do, you couldn't get to the stuff that was way down beneath it. And verse six says that when the seed fell on that, it grew up and withered away. It shot up, popped up, and then died because it had no moisture.

In Southern California, you see this happen a lot. It's pretty common there but it's very dry in that part of the world; very barren. So, when the rains come, the plants pop up and shoot up overnight, but they die a few months later, a few weeks later. They shoot up and the land looks green and lush and beautiful all around the Southern California area then the rains stop, and it all looks brown again; it all just dies. And Jesus says in a similar way, some people are like that with the Word of God. Some people are like that with the gospel, they pop up and die. They shoot up, blow up and grow only to fizzle out a few months later, a few years later.

And then in verse seven He refers to another type of ground; another type of seed that fell among thorns. The word for thorns here is the Greek word "ankathia", which is the same word that was used to describe the crown of thorns on Jesus head. It referred to large thorns, very big ones, you know, two to three inches in length, they're very common in the desert; very common in dry places. And since we don't live in a dry place here, we don't really see a lot of this, we don't see a lot of thorns. But we do see a lot of weeds. And that's what you would compare this to. We do see a lot of pesky weeds that are everywhere. They're in your flower bed, they're in your grass. They're in the farmland, in your greenhouse. And as soon as you kill one, you guys know, another one rises up. As soon as you chop one weed down, another one comes up and take its place.

And Jesus says some people are like that as well. Some people treat the gospel this way because their faith is choked out by weeds. Their faith is choked out by thorns. Weeds have a tendency to grow so fast, so quickly, so strongly that they choke out the life of the plant. They'll kill your flower bed in a matter of weeks. Some people are like that with God's Word. They look healthy and vibrant. For a few weeks, they look wonderful, everything's going great. And then a distraction comes along, and they're gone. Some diversion comes along to take their attention away and you never see them again. And if you're wondering what this refers to, if you look down in the parable, in verse 13, Jesus tells you what this refers to. When He says that,

"Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation, they fall away. The seed which fell

among thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way, they're choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to maturity."

If you notice, as you read that, there's a connection here between these two soils. There's a bridge that joins them together and that is, that they both listened initially; they both heard the word of God immediately with joy and with excitement. But it wasn't long before they stopped. It wasn't long before they quit, because verse 13 says temptation crept in. Temptation refers to evil desires, sinful desires, wicked things. Verse 14 says that the worries and riches and pleasures of this life did the same. And that phrase in verse 14 could refer to anything. Verse 13 is kind of referring to the evil desires of temptation. All this other stuff could refer to anything, any distraction. It's an all-encompassing thing here. Worries are things that you're worried about: worry about the fate of the world; worry about your health; worry about your kids; riches, that means money, and the things that come with it: wealth, cars, houses, pleasures, the same thing. That's what killed their faith too, that's what choked it out. And the application here is simple. The application Jesus is drawing is this: you have to persevere if you want to be saved.

The point He's making is this: you have to hold on to the faith if you want to make it to heaven. You have to keep listening. You have to keep taking the Word of God in. You can't do it one time and that's it. You can't do it one time when you're at church or at camp or at a revival with an altar call and the band is playing softly, and the lights are down low and then you forget about it the rest of your life. It doesn't work that way. Salvation doesn't work that way. You have to do it every day. You have to listen to the Word all the time. You listen to it when you read it; listen to it when you come to church; listen to it when you memorize it, when you quote it to one another in your home or work. That's what saves you.

And I just want to say, this type of soil is also so common in the bible belt. It's so common in a place like Chilliwack. Because you meet so many people who make a profession of faith in Christ, that they respond to the Word, only to disappear a few months later; only to forget all about it when temptations or distractions come along. You talk to the average person on the street here in our town, there's a number of them that have no church background, but there's so many of them that used to go to church. So many of them that used to be a Christian. That's what this is referring to here. They come and they get baptized, and they join, and they get involved, and they get excited, and they get pumped up, and they get everybody else pumped up. And they get us all thrilled to see them and only to stop when they get a few bumps in the road. Only to stop when following Christ gets hard. Which is why this group is so tragic. That's why this particular group is so sad, because these are the people you get fired up the most about as a church. These are the kind of people that get you excited, only to let you down. Because you realize they were not the real thing. Jesus says you don't want to be that way. He says you don't want to be this type of soil either.

You know, the first type of soil never stopped going to church, did they? The first type of soil really never stopped being religious. And they were hardened to it, so it did them no good. That was the first type of soil. These next two types of soils; they start being religious, and then they realize it's not for them and they quit. They start getting enthused about the things of God and they blow it all off. And Jesus says both of these are wrong. Both of these will do you no good. I'll never forget the time I talked to a friend in high school who had just gotten saved. He said that he just became a Christian. But a few months later, he disappeared. And we had no idea where he was. And when I asked around about him, someone else told me that he had gotten a girlfriend. He started dating a girl who was not a Christian, she was not a believer, and he was ashamed about it. So, he stopped coming to church. He threw it all away, because in his mind, he had found something better. My friends, let me tell you this morning, you can't do that and be saved. You can't do that and be a Christian. This is something you can't throw away. This is something you can't abandon. You have to stick with it forever. You have to persevere. If you're in the right kind of soil, you persevere, you hang in there, you never quit.

And that leads to one more point to consider this morning. It leads to one more type of person who hears the Word of God. Just to review these other ones; the first one is the careless hearer. The first type of person who

hears the Word of God is the careless hearer, which means that some people hear the Word of God and they just don't care about it. They don't hear it or take it in because they have no interest in it at all. It doesn't mean anything to them. Their heart has become so hardened. And second, and third, you see the dry hearer and the distracted hearer. Second and third type of person who hears the Word of God here is the dry hearer and the distracted hearer, which means that some people hear the Word of God and they're dry to it. Some people hear the Word of God and they're not hardened; they're not callous, but they're too distracted for it to do them any good. Their mind is caught up in other things like a girlfriend or money, some kind of sin maybe. And this is such an issue today because our world is so distracting; our world is so chaotic, that you see so many people that fall into this category. We want to make sure that this is not us today, which leads to one more point to consider; one more type of person that hears the Word of God and that is the productive hearer.

One more type of person who hears the Word of God, in this passage that Jesus tells us about, is the productive hearer. This is the only type of hearer that Jesus had anything good to say about by the way. And so far, all these types of soils have been negative; they've been bad, but this is the first one where He says something positive about it. Because some people hear the Word of God and they produce something. That's this last group. Some people hear the Word of God and they do something about it. They apply to their lives, they bear fruit, their life changes. And if you read on in verses in our passage, it says this in verse four,

When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable and said, "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, Jesus would continually call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

As you read this, and I read all that to you just for the context again, you can tell this final group is different from all the rest. This last category of soil stands out because this is the only group that Jesus calls good in this parable. If you notice, in verse eight, Jesus calls it the "good soil". This is the only group that He said that about, because this is the only group that produced something. These are the only ones that bore any fruit. That's the point of farming after all, isn't it? And that's the point of sowing, is you want to produce something. You want something to show for your efforts. So, you're not just farming just to farm; you're not just throwing seed just to throw it; you want to see something come out of it. And this is the only group that did that. In fact, when it says that they produced a crop that was a hundred times as great, that means it was a hundred times as great as the initial investment. It was a hundred times as great as the initial seed because this seed went into the ground and went into the soil, and when temptations come, and the worries and riches and pleasures of this life show up, it just kept going. The seed kept growing. When distractions came along; when troubles came in; when the winds blew; storms came along, it didn't give up. It didn't quit on the Word of God. Instead, it bore fruit. It produced something good in their lives. And if you're wondering what that is, verse 15, says it this way. It says, "but the seed in the good soil", this is Jesus' explanation here, (Luke 8:15)

"but the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the Word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance."

That's a very helpful verse. It's very insightful, because Jesus said the people in this soil held the Word fast. That means that they held on to it. They clung to it; they didn't let it go. All these other people let the Word go. The Word came into their life for a season; it was there for a time and then for whatever reason they frittered it away. These people didn't do that. And it also says they bore fruit with perseverance. That means they kept doing it. They kept bearing fruit over and over and over again, week in, week out, day in, day out. They didn't do it one time, and that was it. They didn't bear fruit one time when they were at a revival or a church or at some event, Christmas time or something like that. They did it every day because they listened to the Word of God. Because

they heard it. And the interesting thing as you read this parable; the interesting thing as you go through this, is that that is where it stops. I mean, that's where the parable ends are reading along here and you come to verse 15, and in verse 16, He starts talking about something else. Verse 16, Jesus changes the subject and you're wondering, why? Well, the reason is this. The reason it stopped so abruptly, is for you to get the point that you need to be like this type of soil. Jesus stops here and He ends on this note for you to get the idea that you need to act like this type of hearer. That's the point of this passage. That's the point of this whole thing. You need to hear the Word of God in an honest and good heart and hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance. That phrase there, "with an honest and good heart". It's a reminder that hearing the Word of God is not just a matter for the ears. Hearing the Word of God is not just a matter for the mind or the brain, it's a heart issue as well. So many people don't hear the Word of God. They don't take it in because of their heart, their soul. They don't want it. It's not convenient. It's not entertaining, it's not amusing. It makes me feel bad, so I don't want it.

You can't hear the Word of God like that. The word honest here at verse 15. That's another interesting word, because that means you come to church for honest reasons. You read the Bible for honest reasons. You listen to sermons for honest reasons, you're not doing it so other people will see you and think you're wonderful, and you're a good person, and you're holy; you do it, because you want to know what it says. You want to know what God says. That's an honest heart. That's what you have to have to be saved. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to be super godly and super spiritual; you've got to be honest. This is so important, friends; this is so essential, because if you want to know what the church is supposed to be doing right now; if you want to know what you're supposed to be doing as a Christian, in this crazy year, as 2020 draws to a close, and you're getting ready for a new chapter and a new horizon and a new year, 2021; this is it. You need to be hearing the Word of God.

John MacArthur writes about this, and he says, perseverance with fruit is one of the defining qualities of a Christian. In fact, it is one of the key lessons of this parable, the mark of authentic faith is endurance. Jesus said, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples, indeed, because that is what you have to do. You have to abide. You have to stay in His Word, because temporary faith is no faith at all. The only way to be the real thing in the Christian life, is to make it last. Which leads me to ask friends, do you get that today? Is your faith real? Is it genuine? Is it sincere because it lasts?

As you come to the end of this year; as you come to the end of 2020, can you say that you have more faith in God now than you did at the beginning of the year? Can you say that you trust Him more, and you love Him more? And you're closer to Him now than you were at the start because of what you've learned, because of what you've studied in the Bible? And has it changed your life? Friends, I ask you this because this is important. Remember, this is what the parable is all about. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Jesus said that over and over again in here. He kept repeating it to these people to remind them that you need to hear the Word of God, you need to listen to it, so that you can change and grow. You don't want to end next year the same way you are when it starts.

To ask this another way, which one of these groups describes you as you read this parable? And as you study this text, which one of these soils do you relate to the most? Do you relate to the first group? Do you relate, do you see yourself in the careless soil that was found by the roadside, trampled underfoot, taken off by the birds and by the devil? Do you relate to the second group? Do you see yourself in the rocky soil and the thorny soil that was choked out by thorns and it withered away and dried up and died? Is your Christian faith a constant faith of distraction? Is your mind just all over the place all the time?

Or do you find yourself in the last group? Do you find yourself in the good soil that produced a good crop that was as 100 times as great as your original investment? Friends, I ask you this because this is important as well. Remember, this is what the parable is about. Jesus wants to know, where do you fit in here? He wants to know, where do you see yourself in this parable? This is not just academic, this is not just theoretical, this is personal. This is direct. Our Lord wants to know, how does this relate to you? Which type of soil do you belong to?

Friends, I hope you would say that you see yourself in the last group. I hope you would say you see yourself in the good soil. But even if you don't, I have good news for you. Even if you don't, there is hope. Because if you ask God for help, He will hear you. If you call out to the Lord, He will listen to you. Even when you haven't listened to Him, He will listen to you, and He will change you. And He will turn you into this type of soil. He will change your hard heart, but all you have to do is ask. It starts with you; you have to call out to Him. Will you do that today? Will you call on His name?

In my studies, this week, I came across a story of a fireman who tried to save a little boy from a fire. He tried to rescue him but no matter how many times he called out to him; the boy wouldn't listen. He just stayed put until the boy's father came; until his dad came, and he called out to him, and the boy came right away; came running out of the burning building. And afterwards, the firemen asked the Father, he said, Why? Why? Why did he come to you and not to me? And the man said, because I'm his father, and he knows my voice.

Friends, let me remind you, that's what you have in the Bible. That's what you have in this book, you have the voice of God. You have the voice of your Father speaking to you. The question is, will you listen to it? The question is, what are you going to do with it? Will you hear it? Will you take the Word of God into your heart? Let me pray for you now that you would. I can think of no better way to start the new year than this. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we think about what we have read and studied this morning, our hearts are sad. They're heavy, because if there is, as we've already said, if there's one area where we fail, it's in this. We don't listen. Lord, we don't hear You the way we should, and we want to ask for Your forgiveness and repent this morning. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters as they've listened to this sermon, as they've thought on these things and dwelled on these things. Lord, I just pray the same prayer for them as I would for me; would you soften up our hard hearts? Would you break the hard hearts in this town? We do have a lot of religion here in Chilliwack. We do have a lot of churches, some good, some bad. But so many of us find ourselves in the first three categories of this parable where we are so much like the Jews. Lord, would You do something about that today in our lives? As we start this next year as we start 2021, Lord, would we be different as a result of what we've learned in the Scriptures?

Lord, I thank you for so many people at Grace, that I know, that do listen to the Word and they do take it to heart, and they do care so much about what they're learning. But I know there's some among us that don't. They've become careless. They have become tempted and tried and distracted. Would you draw them back to Christ as a result of what we've studied and, in all things, Lord, would You be glorified? As we seek to take Your Word to heart, as we seek to live it out, would You receive all the praise and all the glory. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

Well, that concludes our sermon for this morning. If you would like to learn more about us, you can find us online at Grace Fellowship Chilliwack.com or you can also hear more about us on our YouTube channel. Just go on YouTube and type in Grace Fellowship Chilliwack, but that's all for now. May the Lord bless you and have a wonderful day.