

The Secrets of the Kingdom

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Preacher: Ray Park

[0 : 00] All right, today we're studying Luke chapter 8, verse 4 through 21. Please turn with me there while I open us up in prayer. Father, I pray that you would be with us, that you would prepare our hearts to receive your word, that your word would bear much good fruit.

Father, I pray that it would be for your praise and for our good, and I pray that you would help me to speak faithfully from your word. And we pray in Christ's name, amen. So Luke chapter 8, verses 4 through 21.

And when a great crowd was gathering, and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trampled underfoot.

And the birds of the air devoured it, and some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.

And some fell into good soil, and grew, and yielded a hundredfold. As he said these things, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

[1 : 21] Now the parable is this, The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard, and the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root. They believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be made known, that will not be known, and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you. But he answered them, My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God, and do it.

[2 : 44] Like many of you, Carolyn and I divide our chores at home. Some of them could go either way. I take out the trash, but Carolyn is perfectly fine at taking out the trash.

She just doesn't like doing that, because it smells right. But laundry is something that Carolyn should do, because unfortunately, I have a history of shrinking our clothes.

I don't want to. I don't try to. I really try not to. But some, I just miss the clothes, right? So like, for example, this sweater, right? I thought I'd wear it today.

It's a little tight. I'm not trying to show off my dad bod, but it's, sleeves are kind of short, and it's one of my shrunken sweaters. So I'm just going to roll up my sleeves so I look hardworking instead of incompetent.

But ultimately, it comes down to, I think, a failure to heed instructions for me, right? I want to be quick and efficient about getting stuff done, but I could just take an extra 30 seconds, read the instructions on the little tab, right, on my sweater, or just remember, Carolyn told me to check out the clothes before I wash it, and I could have avoided it, right?

[3 : 53] And that's what our passage is about this morning. We're studying Luke chapter 8, verses 4 through 21, and the main theme of this passage is take care how you hear God's word.

Take care how you hear God's word. Our passage is split up into three parts, consisting of the parable of the sower, in verses 4 through 15, proverbs around light, in verses 16 through 18, and the encounter with Jesus and his family, in verses 19 through 21.

So let's dive into the first part. The section on the parable of the sower takes up most of our passage, and I'll be spending most of our time here. It includes the parable itself, a brief point about the purpose of parables, and an explanation of the parable.

In verse 4, where we see that Jesus' ministry continues to attract a lot of attention, people from town after town, it says, have come to form a great crowd. So far, he's healed people of physical illnesses, such as leprosy and paralysis.

He's freed them from demonic oppression. He's forgiven their sins, even raised the man from the dead. And people eerily want what Jesus is offering, but the situation isn't as positive as it may seem.

[5 : 06] For one, we know, we've learned that, along with the increase in popularity, there's been an increase in animosity and opposition. Right? The Jewish leaders, they oppose him.

They don't like him. They don't like what he's saying and what he's doing. And also, just because people are, they want what Jesus is giving them, it doesn't mean that they're receiving Jesus himself.

It doesn't mean that they want him himself. It's possible to love the gift more than the giver, and there are probably a lot of people in the crowd here who are only interested in Jesus at this superficial level. But Jesus continues his mission.

We read in chapter 4, Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So he continues to teach, and he teaches them in the form of parables here.

What is a parable? In the Bible, they are illustrative comparisons meant to teach something. Jesus taught with some 60 different parables using illustrations from everyday life, like family, housekeeping, farming, like here.

[6 : 11] And his listeners, they don't need special knowledge or vocabulary to understand the illustrations in the parables. But the difficulty of parables is understanding the meaning underneath it all.

So here's Jesus' parable. A sower goes out to sow his seed. He's just scattering the seed liberally, almost wastefully. He scatters seed. Some fall on unproductive ground, and others fall on productive ground.

The unproductive parts have different issues. First, there's a soil along the path. So apparently in this field, there were paths for walking, walking through the field. And these seeds got stepped on, where they were easy pickings for birds, because the ground was hard-packed, and it couldn't go into the ground.

Second, there was the soil on the rock. And when it says this, this isn't like earth with small rocks in there, but it's a thin layer of soil that sits on top of a base of limestone, which is apparently common in the Palestinian hill country.

And these seeds, they were able to start growing, start germinating, but there wasn't enough soil to hold water for the seeds to grow. So they sprouted up quickly, but then they withered away. Then there's the soil with the thorns.

[7 : 23] There's nothing wrong with the soil itself. It's not hard-packed like the path or thin like on the rock. Instead, its growing potential is being used up by other plants, by thorns.

Then there's only one type of productive ground. It's good soil, and it produces a huge yield, a hundredfold. Again, the illustration is pretty easy to understand what's happening on the surface.

And then after the parable in verse 8, Jesus tells the crowd, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. It's an easy command for the crowds to overlook. It's a pretty short and simple phrase that Jesus says here, but everything in this chapter, in this passage, hinges on this one point because they need to take care how they listen to what Jesus is saying.

Will they think about what he said, and will they consider its meaning and act upon it? Or will they ignore it, forget it, or will they give up in the middle of trying to apply it?

And so the same is true of us regarding God's word. What good does it do to us if we hear the best preaching and the best teaching, but we don't think about it, we don't ponder its practical applications, we don't try to follow it in our lives, right?

[8 : 41] In verse nine, we see that there's a change in audience. They go from a huge crowd to speaking, Jesus speaking to just his disciples. His disciples come up to him.

They know that Jesus isn't, he's obviously not giving a farming lesson, so they say, what does this parable mean? And before explaining the parables' meaning, Jesus briefly speaks to the purpose of parables.

Maybe this is a question that's come across your mind. Why does Jesus speak in parables? They're hard to understand. If he's come to proclaim good news and free the captives, why does he speak in illustrations that aren't obvious, that some people won't understand, right?

In verse 10, Jesus tells his disciples that parables serve a dual purpose. They reveal the secrets of God's kingdom to Jesus' disciples, and they also hide the meaning to others so that these people, they see, but they don't see.

They hear, but they don't understand. So, if you guys remember, as I mentioned, Jesus is attracting big crowds, but in these crowds are people who have already heard Jesus' teaching, and they've rejected it, right?

[9 : 54] Although they've seen Jesus' heal sicknesses, raise a man from the dead even, they're still unreceptive to him and his teaching. So in this context, parables are given. Parables are a form of judgment.

Those who are genuinely following Jesus and try to understand, to them are given the secrets of God's kingdom. But to those who have already received teaching but rejected it, to them further understanding is withheld.

So it's like parables are, like they're a one-way mirror, right? From one side, if you try to look through, it's just a mirror, but on the other side, you get to look through and see what's on the other side.

And this mirror is on a swivel, right? And what determines how the mirror is turned is the choice of a person's heart. Do you want to understand, and do you want to receive Jesus or not?

Now, to be clear, it's not as if God is cheering for people to reject Jesus, and that's far from it. God wants everyone to be saved.

[10 : 57] So we read in 1 Timothy 2, God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And in Ezekiel 33, we read, So God loves us.

He wants what is good for us, and he's cheering for us to live and not die. And God is just. He's the one who judges us according to what is right and good.

And maybe the idea of God using parables as judgment makes you squirm in your seat a little bit. I know it makes me a little uncomfortable. But at a deeper level, I also know that I want God to be just.

I need him to be just. A God who sees wrong and evil yet is unwilling or unable to do anything about it, that's no God at all. We need God to see the injustices of this world and to judge.

We need God to see the mosque shooting in New Zealand this week and to hold people accountable for that. Right? So what does this all mean for us? Well, we need to take care how we listen.

[12 : 19] How are you coming to God's word this morning? What is your attitude? Is your heart soft and receptive to God's word? Do you seek to understand and obey it? Then be joyful because God is revealing the secrets of his kingdom to you.

Right? Keep seeking understanding. Keep asking questions. Be diligent in applying what you've learned. Or do you reject what God says? It holds no weight with you.

You're your own boss, your own God. Only you gets the final say in your life. Then don't expect any more fodder for your rejection and your contempt and your indifference.

But I do hope for better things for us here today. In verse 11, Jesus explains this parable to his disciples. So let's listen carefully to its meaning.

The seed is the word of God and the soil, the first soil, the soil on the path represents those who hear the word, but the devil comes and takes it from their hearts so they can't believe and be saved.

[13 : 20] The second soil on the rock represents those who do receive God's word and initially receive it with joy, but in times of testing, they fall away. The third soil with the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but God's word can't produce mature fruit in their lives because they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life.

And the fourth soil, the good soil, represents those who hear the word and they hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience. I'm pointing out a few additional things from this parable.

First, there's nothing different with what the soils receive, right? They all get the same seed. It's not like the first soil gets like old and rotten fruit or seeds and the fourth gets fresh and strong young seeds, right?

They're all the same. Deficiency is not in God's word, but with the response of the hearer. Second, the good soil is commended for bearing fruit. What is fruit? Fruit is a person's response to God's word that is consistent with God's word, right?

Responding consistently with God's word. So for example, when God says in Philippians chapter 4, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[14 : 34] Then when we feel anxious, we pray to God about that anxiety, about the source of that anxiety. We take it to him. When God says in Romans chapter 8, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to his purpose, when a person faces trials and difficulties in life, we go to God and trust that he's using those circumstances for our good, right?

And when God says in Matthew chapter 28, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The hearer prioritizes helping others follow Jesus, right?

So fruit is a positive response to God's word in the form of trust in God and obedience to his word. Third thing about, an additional thing about these parables or this parable, the soils in this parable represent different kinds of individuals and their overall response to God's word.

It's not meant to represent a person's progression in the Christian life. It's not like you go from soil one to two to three to four, right? And it doesn't represent specific moments in our lives where sometimes we're hard-hearted, sometimes we're receptive, sometimes we give into temptation.

[15 : 54] Now, of course, that's true. Sometimes we do have different responses to God's word in our life, but that's not what this passage is about, and so we shouldn't try to make it say something that it's not trying to say. So instead, when looking at the totality of a person's life, that individual, how do they respond to God's word?

Are they fruitful or unfruitful? And that's the question to ask ourselves. Which kind of soil am I? When I look at my life picture overall, what response have I given to God's word?

Maybe this is a hard question for you to answer because honestly, you've never really heard God's word communicated to you or clearly in a way that demands a response because maybe you've heard of God's word as some nebulous thing, right?

Like the Bible is God's word. That's true, right? But there is a central message in God's word that he communicates to us and that demands a response from us. In the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 1, the time has come.

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. So Jesus tells us the good news of how we can be saved from God's judgment and enter into his rule and reign, which is known as his kingdom, right?

[17 : 00] That's his rule and his reign. The way things are right now aren't the way that things were meant to be. We were originally intended to be under God's rule.

God in his power and beauty, he made the universe that we live in. God in his love and joy made us to know him in relationship for us to belong to him as his people. And as the one who created us, he rightfully has authority over our lives.

In our lives, we were to acknowledge and honor him. We were to delight and be satisfied in him. We were to obey him, thank him, praise him, but none of us experience this in our lives as we ought to.

None of us know God like this. We all fall short of who God made us to be. We read in Romans chapter 1, for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. And that's us, that's speaking of us.

[18 : 06] Instead of acknowledging God as God, we reject him and we ignore him. Instead of honoring him, we doubt that he's good and he loves us. Instead of being satisfied in him as the one who provides for us, we choose to rely on ourselves or on money or anything else really.

And so we fail to meet God's standards for us and this is what the Bible calls sin. In our sin, God judges us because, again, God is just as part of his character.

Romans tells us, for the wages of sin is death. And then Isaiah 59 says, but our iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Also in Romans, he will render to each one according to his works. For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. And as a description in Romans, Mark, sorry, in Mark 9, hell is described as where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

I think sometimes we tend to think of our sins as not that bad, not that serious. It's kind of like a parking ticket. Like, yes, I technically did something wrong and I have to pay for it but it's not that big of a deal, right?

[19 : 21] Overall, I'm a good person and there aren't serious consequences to this but sin is far more serious and far deeper and far more hateful than I often think of it.

Sin is saying to God, God, no, I reject your authority over me and I declare my independence from you. It's saying to God, you're not good enough, you don't love me enough and you don't really care for me so I need to care and provide for myself.

You're not really wise enough to know what's best for me so I need to figure things out for myself. You're not really strong enough to get things done for me so I need to rely on myself and sin is saying no to God and turning to other things to fill God's place in our lives.

It's like if my one-year-old daughter, Caladriel, were to come up to me and Carol and say, you know, you're not doing a good job, you're not doing good enough, like, I'm good, right? I'm on my own. Even though, like, we love her, right?

That's absurd. We're trying our best for her and if God is who he says he is, if he's good and loving, he's compassionate and powerful, if he's holy and the one who created everything and rightfully owns everything, then we see how hateful and wrong it is to reject him.

[20 : 36] So far, this is not good news, like Jesus said, right? This is pretty bad news. We're all sinners and under the just wrath and condemnation of God, we deserve punishment. But the good news is that God's solution for our sin is the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son, like we've been singing about this morning.

In Isaiah chapter 53, it says, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

So, God's got a problem on his hands. He's just so he needs to punish us but he also loves us and wants to save us from that punishment. So what does he do?

How can he spare us from the punishment but still be just? And his solution is he sends Jesus to be born as a man to live a perfect life and therefore he saves us from the punishment that we deserve.

[21 : 52] Instead of being regarded as perfect and good like Jesus deserves, he's regarded as a sinner, as being a liar, a drunk, a murderer, a thief, being a proud man and a selfish man, all the ways that we've fallen short of God's standards for us.

And 2 Corinthians 5 says, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus is our substitute. He switches places with us and we don't deserve it.

This is God's grace, his undeserved goodness. And his salvation from sin is complete. He doesn't just forgive us but he promises us power to overcome that sin and he ultimately gives us freedom from the presence of sin itself.

So God forgives us our uncontrolled anger but he doesn't leave us just to be angry all the time, right? He enables us to grow in self-control, patience, in love, in gentleness. And then when we die we move on from this life and he gives us eternal life, a life free from that sin so we don't, we can overcome that battle that we're facing every day.

And so God has accomplished all of this for us but we must respond. It's like medicine, right? It can be the best medicine in the world and cure your illness but if you don't take it you can't experience its benefits.

[23 : 13] And so we can either accept and receive what he's done for us or we can reject it. To accept God's message we must turn away from sin and turn in trust toward Jesus. It's personally saying something like yes Lord Jesus I will trust you and only you.

I am a sinner and I need you to save me. I'm reaching out to grab onto your hand. Save me or I die. Right? And for those of you who have heard this good news before who have received Jesus into your life let me encourage you to keep doing that.

To continue receiving Jesus because the way the way in to the Christian life is also the way forward in the Christian life. We continue every day to repent of sins and to turn to Jesus in faith.

And as we do we resemble Jesus more and more and we bear fruit in our lives. So this is the gospel. This is the good news of salvation and all of God's word centers around Jesus and what he's done for us.

So the question is what will you do with it? How will you respond? What kind of soil are you? Take care how you hear God's word. Are you the first soil?

[24 : 22] Maybe you think this message isn't for you. You turn it down and ignore it maybe politely. It seems irrelevant and impractical. There are more important things in life. You need to work.

You need to find someone to marry. You need to live life to the fullest and reach your full potential. But what could be more relevant and practical than securing your present and future well-being?

And what's the point of working at things like marriage and work and everything else apart from God who gives us meaning for these things and makes it possible to do these things well?

Maybe you have doubts and concerns. Maybe this sounds somewhat compelling but you're not sure. You're not sure if this message is actually true and credible.

And that's okay. It might not seem that all of this fits into a unified and cohesive whole but if that's you don't stay there. Take the next step.

[25 : 22] Ask those questions. Don't rest until you're satisfied with the answers. If you'd like to talk with someone please talk to me or Matt or Sean and we'd love to talk with you and question with you and wrestle with you.

Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7 ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be open to you. And Jesus he's true to his word. He's trustworthy. We can trust him. Be warned that this is neither a light affair nor a neutral one.

What is at stake is your eternal well-being. And you have an enemy who wants to steal this message and harm you. The spiritual realm is unseen but it's not non-existent nor inactive.

The devil's schemes can be subtle but they're devastating. C.S. Lewis the author of the Chronicles of Narnia wrote many other works and one of them is the Screwtape Letters. It's a fictional set of letters from a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew called Wormwood who's a junior tempter.

Right? So he's mentoring his nephew and Wormwood is responsible for getting a man known as the patient to hell. So in one episode Screwtape writes to Wormwood, I once had a patient a sound atheist who used to read in the British Museum.

[26 : 40] One day as he sat reading I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way. The enemy, God because they're demons, right? Of course was at his elbow in a moment.

Before I knew where I was I saw my 20 years' work beginning to totter. If I lost my mind, lost my head and begun to attempt a defense by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool.

I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch. The enemy presumably made the counter suggestion, you know how one can never quite overhear what he says to them, that this was more important than lunch.

At least I think that must have been his line for when I said, quite. In fact, much too important to tackle it at the end of a morning. The patient brightened up considerably and by the time I had added much better comeback after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind.

He was already halfway to the door. Once he was in the street, the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper and a number 73 bus going past and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of real life by which he meant the bus and the newsboy was enough to show him that all that sort of thing just couldn't be true.

[27 : 56] He knew he'd had a narrow escape and in later years was fond of articulate, of talking about that inarticulate sense for actuality which is our ultimate safeguard against the aberrations of mere logic.

He is now safe in our Father's house. So take the time to seriously consider God's word. Is it reasonable? Is it credible? Does it resonate with what you've experienced in life?

And so ask those questions. So that's the first soil. Maybe you're one of the other two unproductive soils. The second soil on the rock or the third soil with the thorns.

So both of these soils allow God's word to germinate to a degree but neither lets it fully grow and be fruitful. Unlike the first and fourth soils, it's unclear if these people are saved, right?

But the point of this parable isn't about where that line is between faith and unbelief. The point is about how we can best live the Christian life. So only the fourth soil does that.

[28 : 57] So it's unclear in this passage. The second soil represents a shallow faith that cannot survive the pressures of persecution. God's free salvation is an amazing gift and totally worth it but it does have its costs.

It does have its difficulties and one of them is persecution. This makes sense because as Jesus' disciples, we follow in Jesus' steps and he was persecuted and he died.

He died on the cross. In Cambridge Mass in the United States of America in this day and age, our persecution will likely not take the form of physical abuse and imprisonment and death.

More likely, it'll involve social rejection and contempt, being thought of as intolerant or small-minded or dumb or being too morally upright.

You might be the only one of your colleagues at your firm who doesn't enjoy getting hammered regularly or who isn't living and sleeping with your girlfriend or boyfriend and when the pressure's on, how do you respond?

[30 : 04] Don't give in to the pressure but cling to God's word. Follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. Hebrews chapter 12 says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.

So Jesus went through the same thing and what he did was he set his eyes, set his focus on the joy before him and not on the difficulties. So forget about that persecution.

It's only for a moment, even if it's for your whole lifetime. Look to the Lord and consider the joy set before you, the joy of being with Christ, of loving him in return and response with your life.

Look to other Christians around for love and support as well. Don't go it alone. The third soil also fails to produce mature fruit and maybe this represents your life.

[31 : 17] It represents those who are choked out by an excessive concern for earthly affairs, for earthly pleasures, for one's welfare and possessions and comfort.

I say excessive because these things aren't insignificant or unimportant. The issue is one of misplaced priorities. There's too much concern, too much energy, too much time and space in hearts and minds given to these things.

So what does this look like? You might worry too much about how to take care of yourself financially, your income, retirement funds, your home, so you overwork to get more stuff, to get more money, to get that house, to get those clothes.

Maybe our top priority is finding a spouse. So even though you're at a great church that helps you grow in love and faith, you hop from church to church looking for the best looking group of singles and you don't put down roots.

Or maybe you're all about maxing out life's pleasures. You want to step foot in every continent in your life, go to 100 countries, add to your list of restaurants you've eaten. And again, it's not that these things are bad in themselves, it's that if they take too much energy and too much time, if these pursuits take up too much of the space of your life, then not enough is given to God's word so that it can manifest results in your life.

[32 : 41] There's not enough time to read God's word, to meditate on it, to spend meaningful time in conversation with God in prayer, building relationships with other Christians to encourage them, developing relationships with non-Christians to share Christ's love with them.

And you might know and agree that these things are good, you're just too busy, you're too tired for anything else. God might be on your priority list just at number 10 or number 2 but not number 1.

Or are you the four soil? Of these four soils, this is the only one that is commended and that we should strive to be like. We are to respond with an honest and good heart which means a heart that is humble, sincere, that seeks to do what is right and people with honest and good hearts are receptive to God's word.

We are to hold fast to the word which is a description of faith. When persecution and trials come in life, instead of focusing on the difficulties or the stress or contempt of others, we choose to cling to God's word and persevere.

When we're ridiculed for not drinking excessively or we're belittled for choosing to honor God with sex, we might think of Matthew 5, verse 8. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

[33 : 55] We consider it better to see God and have God than to have the fleeting pleasures of life or the good opinion of others. This soil also bears fruit with patience.

Patience is necessary because bearing fruit takes time, right? It can seem slow going or unsuccessful. But when things don't go our way, when we don't see results fast enough, or you seem to be dealing with the same sins over and over again and you're not making progress, you don't give up, but you persevere.

You're patient. You keep going. And I pray that we would all be this fourth soil, that we would be humble, that we would be sincere to receive God's word, and we would hold onto it with perseverance and patience so that God's word can do its work in our heart and in our lives.

So that's the parable of the sower and of the soils. There are two more sections in this passage that I will spend less time on. Verse 16 refers to a lamp being put on a stand so that it can be used effectively rather than hidden under a jar or bed.

This light refers to Jesus and his teaching. He was not given to be hidden, but Jesus shines to his hearers in this world and Jesus demands a response.

[35 : 10] And we can reflect that as well as we obey him and as we reflect his teaching to others. Light has a revealing and exposing quality as well. And so just like sunlight will hit things in our world and it shows its colors, by our response when God's word comes to us, we reveal our hearts and our thoughts regarding God, whether we receive him or not.

In verse 18, we are commanded to take care how we hear. Those who hear in faith, trusting and obeying what they've heard and understood so far, they will receive more spiritual blessing to understand, to trust, to obey more.

But those who don't receive what they've already been given will lose even what little they have. There's no neutral ground. And I think this makes sense in a practical way too. I mean, I heard Carolyn, I think, this week talk about in the workplace how if you have something important to do, you give it to the busiest person in the office.

Why do you do that? They're busy because they're responsible and they get things done, right? So that's similar here. Do you find that you've had a soft and receptive heart earlier, but now your heart is somewhat dull, hardened, confused in understanding?

It's worth some self-reflection to see if there's any area of disobedience in your lives. Maybe God spoke to you about some area, but you fail to listen and obey. So be sure to obey God in that area before expecting more.

[36 : 35] Finally, in verses 19 through 21, we see an encounter between Jesus and his mother and his brothers. They come to see him, but they can't reach him. And Jesus is told this.

The crowd might have expected Jesus after hearing this to say, my family is here, everyone make way, clear a path, right? They're important to me. But instead of doing that, he takes the opportunity to give a lesson.

Who is Jesus' family? Who is special to him? Not his family by blood, but those who hear and do God's word. Now to be clear, this isn't to devalue human relationships.

God places a high value on our family relationships. For example, in 1 Timothy 5, we read, but if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

And in John 19, while Jesus was hanging on the cross in the middle of being crucified, he's mindful to take care of his mother. It says, when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son.

[37 : 46] Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home. So he was a good, good eldest son, right, to make sure that his mother was taken care of after he died.

And so this isn't so much lowering a family, but it's an elevation of the family of God, right? Those who hear the gospel and trust Jesus enter into God's family, a family centered around God that will last into eternity.

So my friends, brothers and sisters, it's my desire that we would all be family members in the family of God. Don't you want to be a child of the God of the universe who made you and loves you?

But that choice is up to each of us. Will you choose to be in Jesus' family? Will you choose to listen to God's word carefully? Will you hold on and persevere and be patient and bear fruit and therefore show evidence that you belong to God?

I pray that it would be so with each of us. Please take a moment to reflect on today's message as we move into our time of prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[38 : 54] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.