

Good morning! It is a pleasure to be with you all today. My name is Matt Chesney and I am the director of youth and outreach for Eagle Ridge. Usually, I am behind the camera here in Beaverton but today I get to step out and trust that into the hands of a 10 and 11 year old! But, let's be honest – they do tech stuff so much better than us anyway! And I have the opportunity to introduce our new series, "Kingdom Stories" and teach a little bit about the first parable Jesus taught about in this set of parables.

But before we dive into that we need to set the stage for this series a bit and discuss this idea of "The Kingdom of God." During the first couple years of Jesus ministry he almost exclusively taught about the Kingdom and for him it was essential that people understood what it was all about – which means... it's essential that we know what it is all about.

At Eagle Ridge we like to say that the **Kingdom of God is a present reality and a future hope**. Or said another way... It's **the restoration of God's rule over all things**. The Kingdom of God isn't just heaven – it includes heaven, but it is anywhere and anything that God has authority over. So, if you have given your life to Christ and acknowledge him as your king, then you belong to the Kingdom. Christ dwells in you and you take the kingdom of God wherever you go. If your home is dedicated to the Lord and you follow Jesus' commands, then your home is part of the Kingdom. It is always changing, always growing, always moving forward.

See, the problem is... that God's kingdom operates much differently than the kingdoms of this world. What we value and hold in most importance... God doesn't. And the things that we discount as not worth our time or energy are often the things that God values the most. It's upside down. Things work differently. So differently in fact that 2000 years ago when Jesus was trying to explain this to people it just didn't make any sense at all. And 2000 years later when we try to explain it to people... it still doesn't quite register completely... So, he spent a lot of time teaching about it – and got a lot of pushback. Because the things that people were expecting were not the things that Jesus came to do or bring.

These parables or stories that we are going to be reading over the next 10 weeks or so will help us learn about those differences. They will help us understand what the kingdom of God is like and how it operates. Because as citizens of that kingdom and ambassadors of that kingdom we need to represent it well and be willing to let God use us to move that kingdom forward.

Now, this first parable that we will be discussing is also the first one that Jesus shared with his followers and in Jesus' words it is the "key" to understanding all the other parables. So, it's a good thing we're starting here.

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.<sup>2</sup> He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:<sup>3</sup> "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.<sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.<sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.<sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were

scorched, and they withered because they had no root.<sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.<sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

<sup>10</sup>When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup>He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables<sup>12</sup> so that,

“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? <sup>14</sup>The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup>Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup>Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup>But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup>Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup>but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup>Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

If you were to read this parable in your Bible you might find a heading above this section of Scripture. That heading likely says something like “The Parable of the Sower” – it’s important to note that these titles or headings were not written by the author’s of the Bible they were added in later to help us easily find stories or sections of the Bible while we are reading or studying. Someone else might just as easily name this “The Parable of the 4 Soils.” And it’s interesting that this parable can easily be given different names because it isn’t really just one thing that Jesus is teaching us in this story... there’s so much more to it. And to make matters more confusing for us, when Jesus explains the meaning of the parable to the disciples he does provide more detail and elaborates on some of the hidden meaning but still doesn’t go into the purpose of the parable as a whole.

But let’s start at the beginning. In verse 3, Jesus starts with the word “Listen!” This isn’t a friendly request – the underlying language and meaning of this word carries several contexts. Obedience and “Hyper” are both attached to the word Listen to create a word that actually means something akin to your mother sitting you down when you’re 6 years old, looking at you with those eyes of hers, and demanding your attention because whatever she is about to say is not only important it demands understanding because of the consequences involved – so you better listen!

And then he tells the story... A farmer went out to sow his seed. Some fell along the path, some on rocky places, some among thorns, and some on good soil.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

The farmer here is of course, is God. The seed is God's Word. And these soil types are people. And God is distributing his word among the people of the world. Now, if God is the farmer... it appears that he is horrible at his job! I mean, I know God is perfect and everything... but... he is the worst farmer I've ever seen! Just throwing his seed about all over the place. I mean, what kind of farmer tries to plant seed on paths and rocky areas? Let alone places with thorns? Every farmer I have ever heard of has a very deliberate process of plowing the soil, (Soil, by the way that has been enriched with nutrients and prepared for crops), creating those little trenches in the earth, planting the seed very carefully, and then covering the seed and watering it. Not just throwing it everywhere they feel like.

But that is just what the farmer does! And, of course, when we remember that the farmer is God it makes sense that he spreads his seed (Word) indiscriminately all over the place. Because God DOES present his word to people that aren't interested or are hostile to it. And it may seem like this effort is wasted – but we need to remember that the mission of God is to redeem his people – all of them. He has empowered his word so that it will not return void. And it is important to see that in the parable God's purpose IS accomplished. The seed (Word) that fell on good soil grew up and produced a crop of 30, 60, and hundred times more than the seed that was sent out.

So the farmer isn't being foolish and thwarted by his inability to do things properly. He does things in a way that seems strange and inefficient to us... but still yields the results that he plans for.

So, that's the farmer or "sower" and what we need to learn from that is that as disciples of Christ we have been trained to be "workers in the field" just like he was. He gave us an example to follow. We are to deliver, to spread God's word to every person we are able. Indiscriminately! It is not OUR job to determine what type of soil is present in someone else's soul. Our job is to plant the seed and tend to it.

Now.... Seed planted on the path or on rocky soil or among the thorns might require a bit more care and tending to produce the results that God desires... so let's talk about those challenges that face each of us and the people that we are to share the word of God with.

Let's start the first type of soil that Jesus describes: **the path**. I'm using the term soil loosely here, because a path is so beaten down and compacted that it has become hard. There is no way for a seed to make its way beneath that surface, and likewise if a seed did somehow find a way to get underneath the surface, it wouldn't have the strength to push through the tough ground to sprout. And even if it did, it would be trampled almost immediately by people on the path! But none of those things even matter because of what Jesus describes in his parable:

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Now, in each of these settings that we are going to talk about I would like to propose that there is an appropriate response by both the "workers in the field" and perhaps by the individual (or soil) that is being cultivated.

**For the seed that is scattered on the path**... in a seemingly hopeless and hostile environment, where the enemy snatches away the word almost as quickly as it is delivered – what should our response be? **Prayer**. As we talked about last week when we learned about the full armor of God, our prayer is powerful and the only weapon we have against the activity of the evil one. We need to pray for these people individually and collectively. As we encounter them and share God's word with them we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will open their heart and help them to be receptive to God's word.

We also can't expect them to "do their part" so-to-speak... because they aren't believers and are in general closed off or hard-hearted toward our faith. We can attempt to encourage them to be open minded... but in the end it is the Holy Spirit that will prepare their hearts not us.

Ok, now let's talk about the next soil, **the rocky places**. Jesus describes this in the following way:

Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.<sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

<sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

As we read these verses, something very specific stands out to me and I hope to you as well. In both the story and the explanation Jesus highlights that the issue here is that the plant has no root. I would argue that having roots in this context means having a firm ground and other believers to rely on and hold onto. This is tragic in my eyes because this believer accepted the word of God! They were joyful! But when trouble or persecution came.... They fell away...

So what's our response as workers in the field? Well, it's our job to help them develop their roots. **To teach them and instruct them in the truth. To surround them and protect them in**

community so that when trouble or persecution comes they have others to support them and to rely on and help them through those difficult times.

And their response is to DIG IN! If you are a new believer and you have received the word of God with joyfulness – then it is time to dig in. You need to learn about God, develop your faith, surround yourself with a community of believers and to practice trusting God through times of difficulty.

The third type of soil is: Among thorns. Jesus describes it this way:

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

<sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Notice how as Jesus describes this seed the plant itself doesn't die. The believer in this case still believes! They hear the word, accept the word, and grow in their faith. BUT... they never actually follow the teachings of Jesus. They never actually obey his commands. They never actually do the work that he prepared ahead of time for them to do. They just.... Exist. They come to church, sing songs, pray prayers, and... nothing. They look REAL good among the thorns... but the don't actually produce any fruit.

So how should WE respond as workers in the field to this type of situation? Well, it would be wonderful if we could take away the worries of this life, and eliminate desires for things that would compete against God's will... but we just can't. What we CAN do... is encourage them, challenge them, inspire them and give them opportunities to bear fruit. We can invite them into a bridge group, share our lives with them, talk with them in private settings about the challenges they face and that we face and pray together about it. We can invite them to serve with us. We can bring them along when we are discipling others. But at the end of the day we need to INCLUDE them. Because if that plant grows strong enough and big enough it will choke out all the thorns around it and change the landscape – not allowing anything to grow around them that wasn't put there by God.

And what's their response (or your response if you felt like I was talking to you just now when I described this plant)? To say yes! When someone invites you to serve, say yes. When someone asks you to join a bridge group, say yes! When you have an opportunity to have a conversation with someone else about God, say yes and do it! Nothing is more important. Now, I'm not asking you to overwhelm yourself by saying yes to everything and become busy at "doing church." But I am asking you to prayerfully consider the opportunities that are available to you and judge your priorities using the same scale that God would use.

Which brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> soil: The good soil. Jesus talks about it this way:

<sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

<sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

So... what makes good soil? Well, Jesus doesn't actually explain that. What he does say over and over again is to Listen! And to pay attention! But what we do know from experience is that it's ground that has been prepared ahead of time.... And it's nutrient rich. And how does soil become nutrient rich? Well.... Most farmers put cow manure on it and mix it in... So... if you're life has a whole bunch of cow manure mixed in... I'd say you're off to a good start! In fact, if you look at the type of people that Jesus hung around with, ate meals with and called his friends and disciples.... They were all people that had a lot of.... "cow manure" in their lives. They were ready for a savior. They were ready to LISTEN. They were ready for a teacher to transform their lives. So they did... and he did...

They did the 3 things that Jesus asked them to do as a response to hearing the Gospel. Repent, Believe and Follow!

So we've already discussed a bit of what our role is as "workers in the field" and how we should respond to these different situations – but I need to reiterate that it is NOT our job to identify what type of soil someone else has. Our job is to spread the seed (preach the gospel) and tend to its growth. God does the heavy lifting and ensures success. So to that end, here are our responses to the teaching:

First, we need to **LISTEN**! Have ears to hear! It is clear that this is the most important aspect of the entire story. To attempt to listen with understanding as if our very lives depend on it! (because they do). And when things don't make sense or we struggle to apply what we've heard to our lives we should seek help from God and other believers to support our own growth.

And that means **getting into a bridge group**! Listen, we don't get bonus points or extra money from the government for every person we enroll in a bridge group – this isn't about something WE want or need – it's completely about what we desire for YOU. It's what you NEED. It's essential to have strong roots, dug in deep, wrapped around others so that when trouble or persecution comes we can stand strong together with God. It also means that we can serve together and practice following Jesus together so that we bear fruit for the kingdom.

We can transform our soil. We can transform the landscape of this world. God is in the transformation business. That's what the Kingdom of God is all about! It's about learning to obey and giving Him authority over all things and learning that we are simply stewards of what he has entrusted us with.