
WE ARE THE CHURCH

Marks of a Healthy Church

SOWING SEED & BEARING FRUIT

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on February 4, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Healthy churches may be marked by many distinguishing features. This message focuses on the essential function of disseminating God's word and being transformed by it. While many professing Christians in the western world seem to imagine that Christians can often look and talk and live exactly like non-Christians, the Scripture clearly teaches otherwise. May God help us all to be fruitful hearers and prolific distributors of His word.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

"The sower sows the word... those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold" (Mark 1:14, 20).

What is the basic function of the Christian life? Surely, this question should be uniformly answerable by most Christians... but you are likely to get quite a range of answers. Of course, we are to do all things to the glory of God (Col. 3:17), but what things are Christians especially commissioned to do with their lives?

It seems clear from the New Testament that Christ intends His disciples (i.e. Christians) to be about the tasks of bearing fruit and sowing seed. These farming metaphors are pointing towards the mission of personal spiritual growth and publically broadcasting God's word. These two are interrelated responsibilities and privileges, and every Christian is commissioned to take part.

We know that God's word alone is powerful to bring life (Rom. 1:16), and we know that God's Spirit must work in us to produce the fruit of godliness (Gal. 5:22-23), but Christians are called to participate in both of these activities.

Christ, the ultimate Sower (Jn. 1:14), has commissioned Christians to sow as well (Matt. 28:18-20). And the God who makes all things work for the good of His children (Rom. 8:28) commands those He adopts to strive towards Christ-likeness (Lk. 13:24; Heb. 4:11). In both, God will produce growth as He sees fit – for His own glory and for our great joy (1 Cor. 3:5-13).

MARK 4:1-20 (ESV)

1 Again he [Jesus] began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:

3 “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

9 And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that [Isaiah 6:9-10] “*they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.*”

13 And he said to them, “***Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?***

14 The sower sows the word.

15 And these are the ones **along the path**, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

16 And these are the ones sown **on rocky ground**: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

18 And others are the ones sown **among thorns**. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

20 But those that were sown on **the good soil** are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Healthy Churches scatter the word of God and bear the fruit of spiritual life.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) THE SOWER SOWS

(2) GOOD SOIL BEARS FRUIT

(3) HEALTHY CHURCHES SCATTER THE WORD AND BEAR THE FRUIT

(4) APP: 2 PERSONAL & 2 CORPORATE DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

MESSAGE

(1) THE SOWER SOWS

- First, what does the Sower Sow?
 - The Sower Sows “the **word of God**” (chiefly the **Gospel of Christ**).
 - Mark tells us Jesus said, “*The sower sows the word*” (v14).
 - Luke quotes Jesus as saying, “*The seed is the word of God*” (Luke 8:11).
 - Peter reminds us that the word of God has life-giving power
 - 1 Peter 1:23 – “*since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...*”
 - Luke explains the growth of the early church as “word growth”
 - Acts 6:7 – “*The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem...*”
 - Acts 8:14 – “*Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John...*” who prayed for them (v15) and “*spoke the word of the Lord to them*” (v25).

- Paul speaks of the authoritative and active word of God.
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 – *“We... thank God constantly for this, that when you **received the word of God**, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, **the word of God**, which is **at work in you believers**.”*
 - What is the particular “word” Paul is talking about?
 - We *“declared to you the **Gospel of God** in the midst of conflict”* (v2).
 - God *“entrusted [them] with the **Gospel**”* (v4).
 - *“We were ready to share with you not only the **Gospel of God** but also our own selves”* (v8).
 - That word received was *“the **proclaimed Gospel of God**”* (v9).
 - The Sower Sows “the **word of God**” (chiefly the **Gospel of Christ**).
- **Second, who is the Sowing Sower?**
 - Jesus **Christ** Himself is the **Sowing Sower**.
 - In Matthew 13, Jesus used another seed-sowing parable.
 - One sowed good seed and another sowed bad.
 - In this parable, Jesus said, *“**The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man**”* (Matt. 13:37).
 - Of course, we may quickly take this to its highest expression by pointing to John’s words in the opening of his Gospel.
 - *“**The light from God**”* (Jn. 1:9) is the same as the *“**Word [who] became flesh and dwelt among us**”* and demonstrated Himself to be the glorious *“**Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**”* (Jn. 1:14)

- **Jesus commissioned** all His **followers** to be **Sowing Sowers** too!
 - The Great Commission
 - Matthew 28:18–20 – “*Jesus came and said to them [His disciples], ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, **teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’*”
 - How do we know that scattering the word of God is what this commission demands?
 - That’s what they did!
 - In Acts 2, Peter preached the word of God – the Gospel of Christ, and “*those who received his word were baptized*” (Acts 2:41).
 - Again the Gospel was proclaimed, and again “*many of those who heard the word believed*” and there were thousands added to the number of Christians/disciples (Acts 4:4).
- **Jesus** Himself is the ultimate **Sower**, and **He** has **commissioned** all **those who follow** Him to be **Sowing Sowers** as well!
- **Let’s stop for a second...**
 - This **parable** is about **soil**, not sowers... but the question has to be asked at this point.
 - Are you a **follower** of Jesus Christ?
 - Have you **heard the word** of the Gospel, and **trusted** in the only good and powerful Savior to save you?
 - Would you consider yourself to be a **disciple** of Jesus?
 - Then, are you a **sowing sower**?

- If not, **why not?**
 - Do you think the **responsibility is not yours...** but someone else's?
 - Do you think that Sowing is going to **lead to less joy** in your life and not more?
 - Would Sowing take **too much time away from the other things** you are doing in life?
- Another **major malfunction** that becomes glaringly obvious at this point is how we (often foolishly) **define “evangelism”**
 - What does a Sowing Sower **do?**
 - Can a sower **make the seed grow?**
 - 1 Corinthians 3:6–8 – ***“I planted, Apollos [another preacher] watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”***
 - Have you made evangelism something that **only a “professional” can do?**
 - Have you made evangelism something that can **only be measured by the number** of responses?

Summary: Sowers (i.e. Christians) sow/scatter the word of God – especially the Gospel of Jesus Christ as promiscuously as possible.

(Segue) **Why?**

One, because Christ commanded His followers to do it;

and Two, because some soil will bear fruit.

(2) GOOD SOIL BEARS FRUIT

- This is a parable about soil!
 - This **parable is foundational** to understanding the ministry of Jesus.
 - “Do you not understand **this parable**? How then will you understand **all the** parables?” (v13)
 - How does the word of God produce growth (Mk. 4:26-29)?
 - Why does the word of God seem so small and insignificant at first, but then grow to powerful heights later (Mk. 4:30-31)?
 - Why is it that some people’s hearts are hard to the Gospel words of Christ (Mk. 8:17)?
 - Why is it so difficult to “enter the kingdom” of God (Mk. 10:24)?
 - And, how does God do the impossible by bringing hardened sinners into His kingdom (Mk. 10:27)?
 - This parable about soil is meant to give us a basis for understanding so much!
 - This parable is about **different kinds of people** who hear Jesus’ words
 - Those described as people like a “**path**” (v15) hear the word of God, but something happens.
 - Other people are like “**rocky ground**” (v16) or like “**thorn-infested ground**” (v18). They each hear the word of God, but something bad happens.
 - And still other people are like “**good soil**” (v20).

- **There are 4 kinds of soil that describe 4 kinds of hearer**
 - Preoccupied People
 - “some seed fell along ***the path***, and the birds came and devoured it.” (v4)...“when [people like this] ***hear*** [the word], ***Satan immediately*** comes and ***takes away*** the word that is sown in them” (v15).
 - Before any connection is made, the word is gone
 - Satan is the “god of this world” who has blinded every lost person to the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).
 - Following the natural course of this world, we are preoccupied by so many other things that we are deaf to the words of life (Eph. 2:1-3).
 - Friends, do you make time to hear the words of life?
 - Do you know that the preoccupations of this world are fatal?
 - How easy and careless our lives are today!
 - It is quite possible for us to go all day without considering the reality of death, our desperate need for church family, our own pathetic sinfulness, or the gravity of God Himself.
 - Oh, beware! Satan would love nothing better than to see you happily distracted from the word of God!
 - May God give you ears to hear today!

- Parched People

- “Other seed fell on **rocky ground**, where it did not have much soil, and **immediately it sprang up**, since it had no depth of soil. And when the **sun rose**, it was scorched, and since **it had no root**, it withered away” (v5-6)... “[these people] **hear the word**, [and they] **immediately receive it** with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when **tribulation or persecution** arises on account of the word, immediately they **fall away**” (v16-17).

- These appear to grow but fall away when difficulty comes.

- Like those who ate the divine bread from Christ’s own hand, these receive Christ as a problem-solver (Jn. 6:25-34).

- Those parched people who see Christ as someone who can merely give them worldly refreshment will be parched again – sooner or later.

- Not all who profess Christ possess Him!

- Jesus said, “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father... I will declare to them [those who profess but do not obey], ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’**” (Matt. 7:21-23).

- Friends, does your Jesus promise only good things?
- Is the value of your Jesus based on the good or bad circumstances of your life?
- Does your testimony about Christ sound like “My life was bad, but Jesus made it better...”?
- What will you do when all you have is Christ?! Will He still satisfy you?
- Oh, may God give us eyes to see Christ as our all-satisfying treasure!

○ Prosperity People

- “Other seed fell **among thorns**, and the thorns grew up and **choked** it, and it **yielded no grain**” (v7)... “[these people] hear the word, but the **cares of the world** and the **deceitfulness of riches** and the **desires for other things** enter in and **choke** the word, and it **proves unfruitful**” (v18-19).

- These grow only the leaves of spiritual life but no fruit.

1. Is there such a thing as an “**unfruitful Christian**”?

- Jesus said, “***I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples***” (Jn. 15:1-2, 8).
- Jesus said, “***No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit... The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil...***” (Lk. 6:43–45).

2. What is it that **makes** these **hearers unfruitful**?

- “...the **cares of the world** and the **deceitfulness of riches** and the **desires for other things** enter in and **choke** the word...” (v18-19).
- “***Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever***” (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

- Friends, are **you unfruitful**?
 - If someone **looked at your life**, what would they say is your **top 3 priorities**? Job, sports, school, wealth, social prestige...?
 - Would anyone who knows you well say that **you highly value biblical fidelity**?
 - How about the **glory of Christ**?
 - How about **growth in holiness**?
- Does this **bother you**?
- **Shouldn't you be striving** toward bearing fruit?
- If you are **at ease without spiritual fruit**, then I am **concerned** that you may not **understand** what it means to be a Christian.
- Don't you know that **your actions show your true love**? Let's not play games with each other!
- ***“Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence...”*** (Hebrews 3:6).

○ Produce People

- “other seeds fell into **good soil** and **produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding [fruit]**” (v8)... “[these people] **hear the word and accept it and bear fruit**, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (v20).

- These hear, accept the word as their own, and bear fruit.

1. Good soil produces fruit.

- “***the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...***” (Galatians 5:19–23).

2. Good soil produces varying amounts of fruit.

- “[these people] hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, **thirtyfold** and **sixtyfold** and a **hundredfold**” (v20).
 - This isn’t a competition to see who bears the most... it is a serious warning and promise:

Summary: Good soil produces fruit – God guarantees it (Eph. 2:10)!

(Segue) No fruit = not good soil...

No spiritual life... No real conversion... No true faith... Not really Christian

(3) HEALTHY CHURCHES SCATTER THE WORD AND BEAR THE FRUIT

- **Healthy Churches promiscuously spread God’s Word – the Gospel.**
 - This should go without saying, but because we (American Evangelicals) have gone without doing for so long, it must be said with force today.
 - “[A] study conducted by LifeWay Research found **80 percent of those who attend church one or more times a month, believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but 61 percent have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months.**”
 - We should promiscuously spread God’s word because:
 - God’s word makes dead things live (Eze. 37:4-10).
 - God’s word cuts through the veil of our darkness (Jn. 1:4-5).
 - God’s word is sure and trustworthy (Ps. 19).
 - God’s word – *especially the Gospel of Christ* – has the power to save our rotten soul... and others too (Rom. 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:18).
- **Healthy Churches are comprised of fruit-bearing Christians.**
 - Among us, both when we are gathered and when we are scattered, we should all encourage and see one another growing spiritually.
 - When did spiritual life and growth among God’s people become a surprise?!
 - When did everyone stop expecting to see Christ transform us and make us His own in practice – not just in theory?!
 - Christians always bear fruit because:
 - God has brought them to this very place in life to do so (Eph. 2:10).
 - God’s goal for and promise to all Christians is *Christ-likeness* (Rom. 8:29).

- **Healthy Churches understand the necessity of fruit.**
 - In other words, *Healthy Churches understand what conversion is.*
 - It seems to me that much of our failure on each of these marks likely stems from our misunderstanding of two things.
 - **One: The Local Church is supposed to be made up of converted people.**
 - The church is the visible “body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12-13).
 - One is not (nor can be) part of the body of Christ before or until he/she has been saved... born again... converted.
 - The church building, services, and resources may well be used for non-Christians... but we must not foolishly believe that we serve non-Christians well by telling them that they are Christians.
 - **Two: Converted people are going to show it on the outside.**
 - You and I cannot know anyone’s heart!
 - We are commanded by Christ to rightly judge deeds, not hearts.
 - If what we have read about soils from Mark’s Gospel does not give us good reason to expect fruit in the lives of Christians, then this passage is nonsense and useless.

(4) APP: 2 PERSONAL & 2 CORPORATE DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

1. Does God's Word produce fruit in you?

- Do you give enough attention to God's word for it to have the opportunity to produce fruit in you?
- Do you read God's word with the intention of conforming and obeying?
- Do you think about God's word and consider how you might apply it?
- Do you seek out others who might be able to assess and encourage your spiritual life and growth?

2. Do you long to see God's Word produce fruit in the lives of others?

- In conversations with friends and co-workers, do you only share your own wisdom, or truths from God's word?
- When someone asks you about a political issue, do you have a biblical word in your response? A biblical citation?
- When your loved one is making a life-changing decision, do you go to God's word with them? Or merely give them your best guess?
- Do you pray for and dispense God's word to your lost neighbor, friend, child, parent, co-worker?
- Do you pray for and dispense God's word to your fellow church members?

1. Do we really believe that God's Word produces fruit in Christians?

- Are we looking to celebrate spiritual fruit in one another's lives?
- Do we know that spiritual fruit indicates spiritual life, and this is a miracle of God at which we should marvel?
- Do we speak the word of God to one another with an eager anticipation of the life-giving and fruit-producing results we might see?

2. Are we expecting and striving for fruit among our church family?

- Have we lost the biblical idea (and notoriously Baptist idea) that churches necessarily made up of Christians only?
- Have we stopped expecting to see Christ deliver on His promises in our real lives?
- Have we imagined that once someone professes faith in Christ that the person is most certainly on their way to heaven?
- Have we foolishly put what others might think of us above what God commands of us?
- Do we believe that God will actually make the person sitting next to you a better Christian this year than he/she was last year?
- Do we believe that God will bless our efforts to strive for Christ-likeness and biblical faithfulness?

Major Point: Healthy Churches scatter the word of God and bear the fruit of spiritual life.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/about/>

The Parable of the Soils by TableTalk Contributor

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/parable-soils/>

The Good Soil by Michael Glodo

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/good-soil/>

The Seed Upon Stony Ground by C.H. Spurgeon

<http://feedingonchrist.com/when-the-preaching-is-bad/>

The Farmer Sows the Word by Kim Riddlebarger

<http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-mark/the%20farmers%20sows%20the%20word%2012%20revised.pdf>