

## Mark 4:1-24 - Harvest

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] all this stuff and other stuff well it's going to most of it will go to caring for life uh that needy place in leeds and it was announced this morning that um we also have a gift box for anyone who wants to put anything uh in there and it's a needy course and uh and we we know that these gifts have always been well received uh just another quick notice which i forgot at the beginning is that if you're going to the midweek mix at gisborough this evening uh and you need a lift please make it sorry on tuesday well we'll go on tuesday okay thank you and uh on tuesday uh then just make it known this evening then we can make arrangements to to pick you up and give you a lift let's just pray heavenly father we do thank you for the good gifts that we've sung about and we know that uh in the distribution of gifts that there is uh much blessing because the lord jesus christ said it's more blessed to give than to receive and so we pray that in all our giving whether it's uh in fruit and uh harvest or money or time uh that in all that we give that uh you might be pleased as we do it for your good and for your glory for the good of your people so we do pray for caring for life and ask that you would bless that work continue with it in leeds as it seeks to reach out to vulnerable people and thank you that it really does care for the lives of those people there and thank you for the fellowship that we have with other churches around this area and pray that lord that as the days go on there may be ever increasing unity amongst the fellowships and that lord as we are like-minded in the things that we believe may we be like-minded in the in the in the proclamation of the gospel and the doing of good to others so help us in this be with us as we look at this parable of the sower gracious god for the glory of your name amen that's a little bit different this evening because i've got um things on the projector colin would you mind turn the light up please and um yes just off it off permanently so so here we are parable of the sower well jesus had been um preaching uh around uh the area of northern judea and he'd been preaching what was uh called the kingdom of god in matthew's gospel it's called uh the kingdom of heaven and uh but the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of god are the same things and the message that he uh was preaching was a message of repentance of sin committed that uh the need to uh be truly sorry and turn away from our sin and to believe in him uh as messiah and as messiah that we heard this morning that he truly was the son of god he was god incarnate in the flesh and uh what he was um doing was authenticating his message with uh with uh miracles and uh the this they were the sign of his authority and in one great argument with uh with the jews he said well if you don't believe me at least believe the miracles because they speak of my deity of of who i really am the reception to the message was mixed you can imagine um that somebody like jesus of nazareth walking

down the streets standing up at hyde park corner speaker's corner or somewhere like that and proclaiming such a message and doing such things well they'd be on the tv on the news they'd reel out all these talking heads these people who seem to have uh such an expert opinion on just about every subject you can think of and there'd be lots and lots and lots of uh debate but it would probably fall into two main categories just as it did in the time of jesus the teachers of the law actually said of jesus they said this um he is possessed by belzebul by the prince of demons he is driving out demons in other words they were saying that jesus was all bad that he was a charlatan that he was a fake and he was bad and everything he did was actually not from god but from the other place from satan the other reaction was strangely from his family because it says in the previous verse in chapter three he says when his family heard this they went to take charge of him for they said he's out of his mind and the word family there actually is not necessary as immediate family but the word is kinsman so the people who knew him from where he lived said that jesus is out of his mind in other words there are two reactions to jesus one was that he was bad and the other that he was mad and in response to this reaction against jesus he then starts talking in parables and when we get to the parable of the sower which is on the same day that this reaction

takes place on on the surface it looks as if it's talking about uh fruitfulness or harvest and uh that's one reason why we chose it as as a as a subject for this evening that it's all about something being sown in the ground and it grows and there's a harvest and isn't that good uh well that might be so but what we're going to see this evening is perhaps another dimension which is that uh the parable of the sower is actually uh a lesson in listening in listening to to what jesus has to say so what i want to do is just simply if you've got your bibles just to go through it piece by piece and just say oh it all fits together in the context of the people who heard it in the first place and we're going to read the first nine verses and the first nine verses say this on another occasion jesus began to teach by the lake that's lake galilee 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 on the water's edge he taught them many things by parables and in his teaching he said listen listen now that's actually a very strong word you could say listen behold you could say pin your ears back you could say this is really important i want you to listen so if you've been at school have you go to school and your teacher says listen or pin your ears back you know what it means you know that something important is going to be said and so he says listen a farmer went out to sow his seed as he was scattering a seed some fell among the path and the birds came and ate it up some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil sprang up quickly because the soil was shadow but when the sun came up the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root the other seed fell among thorns which grew up and choked the plants so that it did not bear fruit again did not bear grain and still other seed fell on good soil it came up grew and produced a crop multiplying 30 60 or even a hundred times then jesus said he who has ears to hear let him hear so this parable is got inverted commas around it and the inverted commas say listen he who has ears to hear let him hear it's important that you understand this now there's the question is is it an everyday story for country folk to to quote the archers is that what it's about is it all about a farmer who's got a farmer who's got some seed presuming it's good seed and he scatters it doesn't do a very good job because it goes all over the place goes into three types of bad soil and one type of good soil and the stuff that lands in the good soil actually produce the harvest is that what it's all about because at the end jesus says he who has ears to hear let him hear now i don't know what how you're brought up but probably like me were you told that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning that a parable is there to explain something that's deep and profound and and that it's a really an aid to to your understanding now you put yourself in these people who sat on the edge of the lake and jesus is in a boat and he's talking to them and he's just said that now the question is does it help what did jesus say well the response actually as we will see is well sorry i just didn't get it so this wonderful teacher the best teacher that's ever lived that could ever live tells a story where our preconceptions say well it's there to help us to understand something and all it does is lead to confusion everyone who heard what he said was mystified and yet at the beginning he says listen and at the end he uses this this turn of phrase which says he has ears to hear let him hear and you think well it was a nice story but i didn't really understand what he was getting at everyone was mystified and what happened is that most people as we heard this morning from barry most people actually at that point left it was okay good story yeah i understand what he's talking about but don't see how it applies to me and so the parable of the sower so instead of bringing clarification actually brings in a mystery brings in something which is obscure what is this obscurity behold i tell you a mystery mysteries are quite common in the new testament in the bible uh that is a quotation from 1 corinthians 15 where paul is talking about the resurrection of the dead and he says behold i tell you a mystery we will not all sleep but we will all be raised that's a mystery it's not a secret our translation here says it's a secret the secret of the kingdom of god has been given to you it's not a secret in as much as something that is going to be hidden away and forever hidden away it's a mystery is going to be revealed and it's an explanation that jesus gives to those who stay behind moving on to uh verses 10 and 11 it says when he was alone that's jesus the 12 and the others around him asked him about the parables he told them the secret of the kingdom of god has been given to you so just think what's happened whole hosts of people crowds masses of crowds have drifted away jesus is with these 12 apostles 12 followers and some other people and the response really is is they had ears but they wanted to hear they heard something they didn't understand it but instead of walking away they went to jesus and they said well what's it all about so in other words that you know this adage if you don't know ask well the message was revealed to those who stayed behind they had ears and wanted to hear and later

these very same people would be the people who would carry the gospel message across the whole of the then known world and speak about this mystery of the kingdom of god on the other side of that coin was if you don't know ask you've got this if you don't ask you may never know and so the people who walked away they never asked they'd had opportunity to to stay they'd heard exactly the same things that the ones who stayed had but chose to remain in confusion so you can see what's going on here this is um this explains what actually comes next because what comes next is in fact what jesus says uh he says that but to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that there may be ever seeing but never perceiving ever hearing but never understanding otherwise they might turn and be forgiven and so here what we have is what the theologians would say is is man's responsibility man's responsibility is to listen to the word to listen to the gospel and then respond to it and the response is one or the other there is no sitting on the fence you will walk away and say okay you know it's all right for you to have faith isn't it but uh i prefer football you know that sort of modern post-modern uh reaction that we get or you stay behind and say well what does this mean what is it all about so jesus is now going to get to the heart of what he wants to say what he wanted to say in response to these two reactions with that he was mad or bad he's going to now say well i'm not mad and i'm not bad what i'm saying is absolutely the truth and you need to understand that i am the son of god who is actually saying this but he's only going to say it to those who wanted to hear let's read the next few verses mark 4 chapter 4 verses 13 to 20 jesus said to them don't you understand this parable it's a bit of a tried there isn't it don't you understand this parable well um and then he says well how will you understand any parable and so he's teaching his disciples his disciples were being taught at a very early stage that they really had to get to basics down to basics and so he goes on and says well the farmer sows the word 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 others like seeds sown on rocky places hear the word and at once receive it own with joy but since they have no root they only last a short time when trouble or persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away and still others like seeds sown among thorns hear the word but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word making it unfruitful others like seed sown on good solid hear the word accept it produce a crop 36 or even a hundred times what it was so the first and most important thing to understand jesus is saying is the seed is a word now luke's gospel actually says the word uh it actually says that that uh that it is the word of god uh so the word is there's no ambiguity about what he's talking about eight times the word is mentioned we've had the word mentioned eight times in john's gospel every christmas we we read uh this i'm sure does anybody think what i'm thinking about um where it john's gospel opens up with this it says in the beginning was the word and the word was with god and the word was god and then it says and the word became flesh and dwelt among us so jesus at this very early stage is actually saying well look the seed is the word and i am the word you need to understand that you need to understand that the message that's coming out is me this is my message this is the message which is full of truth and you need to understand that whilst the the word is jesus so you also need to understand that the soils are people you need to understand that and he says that some people are like seed among the path so here this parable is opening up i am the word and you are the soil now that's that's an incredible advancement the people who walked away never understood that never got it uh but here the disciples and those with him they're suddenly confronted with the fact that jesus says i'm the word i am the seed and that you are the soil and there's only four types of soil that this word will actually go to so i'm going to divide the whole world into four and these are the four the first one is this that uh that the seed is sown along the path where the word is sown and as soon as they hear it satan comes and takes away the word that was sown that's the first place where there's the where a four that the seed can go to and it's going to an impenetrable heart it's going to those who majority of whom were on that lakeside and they walked away and they say oh i'm going back to fishing or farming or whatever it is they hear the word they shrug their shoulders and say nothing to do with me and that's satan actually snatching the word from their minds it has no lasting effect within their hearts they hear it and they're gone it's an impenetrable heart the next place where this word is spread is where it says here in verse 16 others like seeds sown on rocky places hear the word and at once receive it with joy but like but since they have no root they last only a short time and

[ 20 : 14 ] when trouble our persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away and this is a warning that says look if you're going to become a christian you're going to be a follower of me

then you need to understand that you're going to get into trouble there will be opposition to this word just as there's opposition to me there will be opposition to you and that's what's happening in this country today we find that there is more and more uh alien alien alienation side lying of christians that those who work crosses or those who want to say prayers in their work uh are singled out and they're fired and those who don't want to take in people with whose lifestyle they don't agree with into their hotels they are taken to court as well there's this alienation going on so it doesn't mean to say the persecution is open and and it's overt and it's and it's cruel and a torture or imprisonment which does happen more and more but the here is the the the trouble that being a christian will you may well find yourself in and what he's saying that if your heart is like a rocky place where the seed comes and you think wow this is great being a christian car i've got so many new friends and i read the bible and it's super be aware because god may welcome and test your faith and he may well say well i'm going to give you a little trial here i'm going to get somebody at work to make a bit of trouble for you or somebody at school or i'm going to put you in a position where you're going to have to turn a promotion down because you don't want that job because it's against some christian principle that you might have but god will throw a test in and that test will be for faith do you have faith and what he's saying is that this second category of person will get the seed and will look like a christian but when the trouble comes you'll be gone sorry too much trouble yeah i used to be a christian once and how many times do you hear that we have a son who would say i was a christian once and uh and that happens all the time there's a great flush of life great flourish of of activity and joy and then there is a falling away that's the second kind of place where the seed can fall jesus then says still others like seed sown among thorns hear the word 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 the impulsive heart we've just looked at that's the seed into the rocky place and we're now going to look at the impure heart and this is the heart of the person who who receives a word and it looks great and and it's you know just like the seed in the rocky place everything's fine but then something comes along maybe it's some some temptation quick get rich quick or something jesus explains it here he says the worries of this life the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the world where we live in a a culture where the desires for other things has already come in in abundance like a flood and every one of us is tempted in these ways to to look at these things and to and to put those second to put those things sorry first but what the christian is called to do is to put christ first and everything second and if you don't what will happen is that the these things will choke in come in and

just like thorns will come in and choke that which was sown we live next to the golf course and there's thorn thistle seeds flowing over all the time and the biggest pain that we have in the garden apart from chickweed are thistles and they just come up from nowhere and they just kill everything in and that's what's happening you hear the word you receive it and then these other things come in and strangle so there's no fruit that's what jesus says it makes it unfruitful now those three hearts the impenetrable heart the impulsive heart the impure heart are all types of soil that every one of us can exemplify and be but if you think about it jesus is talking to the 12 and the 12 that he's talking to are his disciples and the first mention of all those 12 are in fact just before in chapter 3 and the last one that's mentioned is judas the one who betrayed him and judas's name is never mentioned without that caveat as being the one who betrayed him and so right in the midst of them there is somebody there who has an impenetrable heart he has an impulsive heart he even performed miracles and he also has an impure heart and so it's possible to be all kind all of these three all together to be impulsive impenetrable and impure and this is what jesus is getting at he's saying you need to listen to your reaction to what i'm saying because your reaction to what i'm saying actually will define who you are whether you're christian or not and what he's saying when we get to the last one aren't we glad to get to the last one it says this he says that other seed sown on good soil hear the word accept it and produce a crop 36 or even 100 times what was sown and what jesus is saying there he said it's only the christian that can produce fruit or bring a harvest and not talking about this kind of harvest but a harvest that is acceptable to god a life that is pleasing to god and some will produce you know a little bit and some will produce a lot but the call of being a christian is that everybody has to produce fruit and the prayers of of the psalmist are to produce fruit in old age that's one of the prayers of the psalmist that no matter what how old you are how young you are you must be producing fruit fruit that is pleasing to god in other words you need a heart that's actually been implanted with the grace of god and this is where jesus is heading he's heading

to the reality that your heart needs to change because you've got a rocky heart you've got a hard heart you've got a heart that's loads of thistles in it your heart is ruined but i can take away all that rubbish all those rocks take it all that path away take all those thistles and weeds away and i can purify that soil and i can purify your heart and i can make your heart acceptable to me because god is saying i will implant my holy spirit within you and the planting of the implanting of the holy spirit in the heart of a person is being born again and to be born again is god's wonderful gift and that's what he's he's driving towards he's saying be very careful are you here you've got ears to hear here and don't be like those who walked away well that's it we can go home now can't we um but not quite because at the end of this um

this parable the there are four strange verses it seems strange at first sight let me just read them to you with the verses 21 to 25 he says this to them did you do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed instead don't you put it on its stand for whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open if anyone has ears to hear let him hear it's getting a bit tiresome this isn't it you know it's it's been pretty hard so far but you're still going to listen and then he says consider carefully what you hear he continued with the measure you use it will be measured to you and even more and whoever has will be given more and whoever does not have even what he has will be taken from him well what does that mean well first of all verse 21 do you do not bring a lamp and put it under a bowl or a bed it's a ludicrous picture isn't it it's a ludicrous um you know thing to think about you know you've got a lamp and you light it and you think oh i'm going to put it in this prominent place and i'll put something over the top of it well you wouldn't do it and so this is this is a bit of hyperbole on on jesus's part he's he's exaggerating to make a point and the point that he's making is in verse 22 for whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open and that deals with the first category of people it was hidden from the people the people who walked away it was hidden and so he said but whatever is hidden will be disclosed and you as disciples will have to take up the message and you're going to have to proclaim it and when you proclaim it you're going to have to reveal this mystery to all those who have never heard it and to those who have heard it and hitherto have rejected and that not only was this uh message uh really foretelling it was also a message that is to be a sowing for all the people so what he's saying is is this this message which is hidden that only you you 12 and a few more people know about you're going to proclaim it you're going to take it out into the open and you're going to have to declare it to everyone and you're also going to have to as it were sew it to all people you're going to have to take it to the hard path and the rocky place and the place with thistles and when you're sowing it some of it will land in good soil because my holy spirit is going to be at work and that holy spirit he is going to change the lives of the people who hear it this message is for telling you just go and tell it your job is to tell the message and he says that in matthew's gospel in two occasions i'll just read one to you and uh he says this he says you are the light of the world a city on a hill cannot be hidden neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl it's the same analogy instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house in the same way let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven that's the calling of a christian the message for telling a message for message for proclaiming and to do it everywhere indiscriminately be a really bad farmer and just throw it anywhere because god is going to provide the increase but not only is it a message for telling we also can see that in verse 24 he says with the measure you use it will be measured to you and even more whoever has will be given more whoever does not have even what he has will be taken from him and so this is a message for hearing it's a message for telling and it's a message for hearing and this is what this parable is

all about it's for telling and it's for hearing and what i will do says jesus in effect is that i will give you ears to hear if you have an open heart a heart that is receptive to the word of god then i will come in and i will implant my word and i'll give you ears to hear just as these disciples we sat privately with jesus and receiving this uh extra tuition and uh all that it's called all that we're called to do is to ask and then we will receive so that's that's the message the message is tell it and the other one is hear it and we're all to hear it no matter who we are whether we're a christian or not we have to hear and respond to god's word but if we're not a christian we have a very special um thing to do which is to believe it and to turn to christ in the book of hebrews it says do not harden your hearts and he's speaking to the children of israel says do not harden your hearts and that was what happened to the first seed that went on to the path it was into a hard place a hard heart and the warning is do not harden your hearts remember judas judas had hardened his hearts and he looked like a christian

he looked like a really good guy he was a treasurer held a money bag but he was a cheat and he was a fake and he produced no fruit many walked away that day and they perhaps heard it again when jesus was raised from the dead and resurrected and these disciples went out and they proclaimed the same message the same mystery and they told them about the death of jesus christ how he had died for their sins how he lived that perfect life they were given a second chance maybe or a third chance maybe but there comes a point where god may well say well enough is enough you've demonstrated what you think of my word and what you think of my son and i will just not try anymore that's a terrible place to get to but to all who believe in him to all who received him to them he gives the right to become children of god again we read this at christmas time that in the beginning was the word and the word was with god and the word was god he was with god in the beginning and it says that yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of god children born not of natural descent or of human desire or of a husband's will but born of god and that was what jesus was about he was talking about the word that was proclaimed am i mad am i bad or am i the son of god who has come and lived and died for you so that you might receive forgiveness of sin and that you might have eternal life let's pray our gracious god we thank you for this your word and we pray that lord that each one of us here may know what it is to respond to your word in that way that is challenging us even at this moment whether it's christians or non-christians we're each of us constantly challenged by your word and we thank you that when you do that your holy spirit is at work and you are leading us to the savior to the one who is truly christ our lord so help us to give thanks for all your all your goodness to us but also help us to give thanks for the lord jesus christ help us to put our trust in him and to turn from all those wicked things from all the distractions which ruin our lives and help us to make him first in all things for the glory of his name amen