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Seed Sowers

Mark 4:1-9

Again he 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. And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 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. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

I want to talk today about you and I being sowers of good seed.

One of the things I love about springtime is going outside when it's warming up and walking around the piece of property that the Lord has entrusted to us for a time. And as I walk around there, there are some things that need cleaned up in the spring. The heavy ice and the snow often break off many branches in the trees around our acreage.

Then also we have snow removal that, because I do it imperfectly, leaves a lot of gravel on the grass in our yard. And so I have to take some time to get the gravel out of the grass before the grass springs up and we start to mow.

But another thing that happens in the spring is that the seeds that were seeded by the living things around our property start to sprout. And I look around and I start to see the sprouting of different plants in different areas that I wish weren't there. Some of them are dandelions, others of them are crabgrass. Some of them are the sprouts of new trees, because God created living things to reproduce in this way.

And so then I'll do a little work to keep those to a minimum, the plants growing that I don't want growing in certain areas. That's the work of spring for me, and I enjoy it because I have a sense as I do it that we were created to bring order to the world around us. You and I are, by God's design in his image, creators as well.

And I'm sharing this with you today to highlight the nature of life itself. Life is reproductive. Trees produce trees, flowers produce flowers, grass produces grass. And you and I produce things with our lives as well.

In this illustration that God is giving us, he's talking about individuals being people who sow seeds from which they reap a harvest. Very specifically in the text, as Jesus was teaching them in these parables, he said to them, "Listen, pay attention to this. Behold, take note of this. A sower went out to sow some seed."

This is an illustration of you and I by God's design. You and I are created to be sowers of good seed that multiply ourselves, that reap a great harvest in our lives. But unlike trees and unlike grass, and even unlike the animals, you and I can choose what kind of seeds we want to sow.

So we can sow seeds that produce good harvests, or we can sow seeds that produce bad harvests, not only in the physical realm, but we can sow these in the spiritual realm as well, for which we will reap a harvest.

God told it to us this way: the one who sows from the corruption or the sinful nature, the flesh, the one who sows from that part of them that is bent toward evil, they themselves will reap corruption and evil back. But the one who sows to the Spirit, to the goodness of God, in the power of God, in the life of God, they will reap this life back, the spiritual life welling up into eternal life.

You and I are sowers of seed. Make no mistake about it. As we go about our lives, we're casting out seed for which we will reap a harvest. Behold this. Pay attention to this.

God even emphasized it more when he said, "Don't be confused about it. Don't be deceived about it. God will not be mocked. His laws will not be violated. He will not be tricked. For whatever one sows into the world, they will also reap. It will come back to them."

The beauty of this is that if you don't like what you're reaping today, you can start to sow different seed and reap something different down the road.

The laws of sowing and reaping are quite simple. They're very clear in this text. First of all, the first law is that we reap what we sow. If we sow grass seed, we're going to receive grass. We reap after we sow. We don't see change instantly, but eventually we will see change coming about from the seed that we sow.

And then the third principle in this, and you see it in the text, we reap more than we sow. Whatever we sow is going to get multiplied.

So how are we sowing seeds? Let's just talk about it a little bit this morning. You and I are sowing seeds all the time in our lives. We are seed sowers. That's what we're doing. Almost everything we do sows a seed.

First of all, in this text, the seed that's being talked about is the words that we speak. He said to them, explaining the parable, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the

parables? This one is foundational for understanding all of the others,” he said. And then he said this: “The sower sows the word.”

God has given us a very powerful tool right here. It's like that little tool I have that sows seed. When we crank this up and stuff comes out of it, the seed of words are sown.

We may not think about it very often, but this tool right here is very powerful. Not only the words that come out of it, but the actual tone we use in speaking them. King Solomon said from the fruit of a man's mouth, he either will or won't be satisfied by the yield of what they speak into the world. It will have an effect on their joy and satisfaction in life.

And then he said, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”

Maybe you've heard this catchphrase used often in our world: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” If you've ever talked with someone who grew up in an environment where the words that were spoken to them were constantly negative, constantly shameful, constantly degrading, you know that that catchphrase is a lie.

Words are very powerful. The fruit that comes out of our mouth, the tone in which they come. I know this as a preacher. I have to sit before the Lord at times and ask him, “Did I say things that were honoring to you? Was the tone in which I said them appropriate before you? Were the seeds that I planted seeds that were coming from you, or were they coming from the corruption of my flesh?”

You and I are constantly passing out seeds into the world by what we say, and it's very powerful, friends, the tone in which we say them and the words that we speak.

God spends a lot of time on this in the Scripture. At one point he tells us to let no unwholesome word, not a single unwholesome word, come out of our mouths except for that which is for the building up of others.

The power of our words, friends. Sometimes we have to say hard words to be constructive, to build others up. But the tone in which we say them and the approach in which we do it, we should do it in a way that gives life to people.

I don't know if you've listened to a recent song out. It's very popular now: “Speak life, speak life.” God has given us the power to do this.

If we're struggling with this, as James says, who can tame the tongue? Let me tell you where the words come from. Jesus told us where they come from. “The good person, out of the good treasure of their heart, produces good. The evil person, out of the evil treasure, produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

If you have trouble speaking encouragement and speaking life, and you find yourself often speaking negatively, you don't really have a mouth problem. Your mouth doesn't need cleaned out with soap. You actually have a spiritual problem deep in your heart that needs cleansed.

You and I are sowing seeds all the time with what we say, the content of what we say and the tone in which we say it.

Secondly, we're sowing seeds with our attitudes and our actions.

As a young father, I was working two jobs. I was working a ministry job, and then I went home and I was raising livestock. And when it came time for dinner, I was often very wiped out. And I would get to the table, and sometimes I sat at the table with a bad attitude.

Now because of this, and because sometimes the attitudes that the kids carried to the table, we instituted a small rule at our dinner table. The rule was simply this: if you have a bad attitude that is casting bad seed into the environment at the dinner table, you will politely be excused from the table to go into the bathroom and look in the mirror until you can talk yourself back into a good attitude.

This happened a few times with our children, and I will not forget the day it happened to me. As we were sitting at the table and I came with an oppressive attitude there, casting seeds of oppression onto the family, the children looked at each other, they looked at mom, and mom spoke up and said, "Tim, we're going to have to ask you to leave the table and go into the bathroom and look in the mirror until you can put on a happy face."

I'll never forget walking into that bathroom. I will be really honest with you. I do struggle with my attitude in life, and I have prayed about it numerous times over the course of my life, and God is helping me maintain a more positive, strong, faith-filled attitude, actually more positive and faithful than I ever dreamed.

God cares about our attitudes and our actions. Very clearly he says in his Word, our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Think of Christ's life. It wasn't easy. He faced great resistance. He suffered a lot. He experienced a lot of pain. But in the middle of all of this, you never once see him whining or complaining. You never once see him blaming others with a bad attitude, getting hard-hearted.

Even when it was time for him to go to the cross and pay the penalty for that old nature of ours, Jesus was deeply burdened by it. He poured out his heart to God, but you never see him with a bad attitude. It actually says, "For the joy set before him he endured the suffering and the cross."

Our attitudes cast seeds, and so do our actions. Our love should not just be with words and with talk. It must be true love which shows itself in what it does.

We're seed sowers all the time, sowing seeds with the words that come out of our mouths, but also the attitudes and actions that we carry in the world, and with the resources that God entrusts to us: the time we have, the talents we have, and the resources we have.

And you and I get to decide every day, every hour, what we're going to do with our energies, our attitudes, and our stuff. And God is watching. He cares.

Resources in the Bible are like a trust given to us, but they're also a test to see what's in here. We're sitting in a magnificent worship center. Why are we sitting here? Because there are people who have taken some of the resources that they've been given by God and cast them as seed into the advancement of his kingdom through this church.

Remember this. God said, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

Each person should, with their resources, use them in the world in a joyful way as they've decided, for God loves a cheerful giver. And then God says this: "I am able to bless you abundantly so that in all things at all times, having all you need, you will abound with every good work. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also increase the store of your seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness, so that you'll be enriched in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion."

I've been around people who have experienced this, and the generosity and the flow of attitude and energy and resources out of them is just fun to be around. This is God's upward spiral in life. It's very unique, and we're going to talk more about it next week.

But the idea is this: if we give ourselves away, we become richer and richer as we go. If we give our life away, encouraging others, if we keep our attitudes right and serve others, if we use our resources in service to the betterment of the world and the advancement of God's kingdom, he will continue to pour into us more and more, so that all of a sudden we just become an overflowing cup reaching out, from which more and more can take encouragement and life.

That's what it means to be a seed sower. Certainly some of the seed that we sow will fall on barren ground and won't produce much, but some of it will fall on good ground. If we cast enough seed, friends, it will then be multiplied some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred, even to a thousand or more fold.

For God himself lives in this way, and he himself is very generous.

One of the great ways that you and I can actually leverage spiritual growth is to pay attention to the harvest we're experiencing. Is the life that we're experiencing the life we really want? And if not, why?

And the beauty of seed sowing is with just one seed after another, we can start to change our lives. We can start to reap a different harvest. But this requires that we pay attention to the seeds that we're sowing and the harvest that we're getting.

If what's coming back to us isn't what we like, we shouldn't blame other people. We should ask ourselves, "What have I done to help create this?" And then ask God how to sow different seed, because not only are we sowing seeds with those things, but we're sowing seeds with our lives, our very lives.

And God has asked us to sow our lives, all of them, into him, to be planted with him. Paul said it this way: "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's kindness and his mercy, offer your bodies as a

living seed to God so that he might bring it new life and bring much good out of it. This is our proper act of worship.”

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to gather here. You have said in your Word clearly that we reap what we sow. We live in a world that really pushes us to blame other people and other things on a consistent basis, but you constantly invite us in your Word to look in the mirror and ask us to consider how we're contributing to the world ourselves.

Are we sowing seeds from our old nature, and how are those seeds sprouting?

And Father, as we're gathered here now, we want to be a church that is sowing the seed of your Word into the world. We can only do this by your power and by your strength, so I ask that you would help each of us be reflective on how we're doing, and then inspire us, correct us, instruct us, and train us so that we could all be great seed sowers.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.