

Staying Faith
"Taking the Gospel Deep"
Mark 4:1-9, 14-20
November 9-10, 2013

Introduction:

(Out of video): My name is Will Toburen and I'm one of the pastors here. Summit Church because of your radical generosity and willingness to live All-In we have seen God do some incredible things at all of our Summit campuses including here at Brier Creek.

Let me give you just a glimpse of some of the ways we've seen God work here at our Brier Creek campus:

- Central Asia Mission Trip: Close to 50 people went many going on their first trip. Beyond that several of those that went are now planning to lead trips to other strategic areas on 2014.
- There are dozens of families that have entered into the adoption process bringing orphans into their homes and modeling the spiritual adoption we have in Christ.
- Just last weekend over 20 people helped a single mom, who they had no connection to yet just wanted to serve, move to her new home.
- The number of adults engaged in small groups has almost doubled which is really strong.
- God is at work!

The good news is that we're only at halftime of our All-In initiative and we believe that next year will bring even greater things. This halfway point gives some of us an opportunity to examine and renew our All-In commitments. And for those of us, including myself, who are among the 1000 people who weren't here when All-In launched we get the opportunity to join in on what God's doing.

This weekend we're going to continue in our series 'Staying Faith.' Last weekend Pastor JD reminded us from Peter's experience of walking on water that when it comes to faith it's not how start but how we finish.

We discovered that **initial faith** isn't enough...we need **staying faith**. 'Staying faith' means focusing on taking the next step, constantly looking to Christ and confidently trusting in His character and promises. As Pastor JD challenged us, **"Getting to the end of your life and feeling like you walked on water is the result of a lifetime of small, faithful steps."**

This weekend I want to build on last week's sermon by turning our attention to Mark 4 and the parable of the sower where we find this essential truth:

- **SLIDE: "Staying faith requires driving the gospel deep."**

So, look with me in your Bible at Mark 4 and I'm going to start reading in vs. 1.

Scripture Reading:

"And 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! 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 thirty fold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jump forward with me to vs. 14 where Jesus explains the parable to the disciples who've come to Him seeking understanding:

"The sower sows the word. 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. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, 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. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who 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. 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."

This is the Word of the Lord. Will you pray with me as we ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scripture to our hearts and minds?

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

"Heavenly Father, we ask now that you would send the same Holy Spirit who inspired this Word to open our hearts to its truth. Please remove from us apathy, cynicism, callousness, or rebellion, so that we may really be hungry for this bread of life that feeds our souls, nourishes our hearts for your work, and fill us with the joy that is our strength. This we ask for the honor and glory of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen."

As we saw in the Scripture, immediately after sharing the parable with the masses, the twelve come to Jesus seeking explanation (which is indicative of their trusting in Christ.) So Jesus graciously explains it to them:

- 'Sower' – primarily represents Jesus but in a very real sense represents each of us as we seek to faithfully spread the gospel.
- 'Seed' – Word of God...the Gospel, "The sower sows the Word."
- 'Soil' – represents the condition of the heart.

Before we go any further I want to share my heart with you and my prayer for this morning. Jesus goes to great lengths to describe various conditions of our heart.

My prayer whether you're a follower of Christ or a skeptic is that we would be able to identify which condition most accurately reflects the condition of our hearts and consider (perhaps for the first time) how to drive the gospel deep.

There's going to be a temptation within many of us to see ourselves only as the fertile soil that's bearing much fruit. We are hard wired to seek to justify ourselves and it's pretty easy to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

So, I want to challenge you to resist that temptation and realize that at any given season our heart can be like any of the ones described by Jesus:

- **SLIDE:** Hard Soil: Jesus paints the picture of a heart that is hard where the word (seed) can't go deep.
 - For some of us...if we're honest...this is where we are.
 - We've been exposed to the claims of Christ and the gospel message, but for whatever reason our heart has become hard and calloused towards the message and the gospel hasn't taken root.
 - Reasons:
 - **Suffering:** Perhaps your wrestling with how a God who claims to be good and benevolent allows suffering. You look at all the suffering in the world (like even recently in the Philippines) and you've come to the conclusion that either He isn't good because if He were surely He wouldn't allow it; or He isn't powerful because if He were surely He would stop it.
 - **Social Issues:** Maybe your understanding of what the Bible has to say about hot button social issues (ex. marriage, sexual ethics, right to life) has caused you to turn a deaf ear to the claims of Christ.
 - **Science / Supernatural:** Perhaps you have a hard time believing in the supernatural and believe that everything has to have a rational / scientific explanation.

- Let me say that each of these good, honest, and fair questions that we all need to wrestle with. But let me encourage you not to let these objections be the starting point.
- Perhaps the next step for you is to commit to having an open mind and first wrestle with the resurrection!
 - With an open mind wrestle with this one question, “Was Jesus crucified, buried, and did He rise from the dead?”
 - If He did then it’s a game changer. **If Jesus died in my place and resurrected proving to be the Son of God then I can begin trusting what the Bible says about suffering, social issues, and the supernatural.**
 - If His death, burial, and resurrection isn’t true, then what he said about these other things is really inconsequential...so start there.
- **SLIDE:** Rocky Soil: Represents a heart that receives the word but as soon as **hardships arise as a result of faith**...the new found faith withers
 - Vs. 16-17, “*And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, 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 (underline that in your Bible), immediately they fall away.*”
 - Jesus is describing people who’ve started well in the faith, but as tribulation and persecution arise they aren’t finishing well.
 - Jesus experienced this with some of His followers
 - In John 6 Jesus begins teaching his disciples (after performing signs, healing the sick, and feeding the 5000) and he tells them that he is the ‘bread of life’...which seems benign enough, but He goes further.
 - John 6:53-55, “*So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”*
 - “The flesh and blood” = reference to the sacrifice Christ makes to earn our salvation
 - “eating and drinking” = life of faith / whatever that meant
 - Put yourselves in their shoes for just a moment and imagine what’s going through their minds. Surely they thought Jesus was out of His mind.
 - John 6:66, “*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*”

- Many of these ‘disciples’ were comfortable with Jesus when he was healing people, multiplying food and drink, and performing other miracles.
 - But when they were confronted with what it would really cost to follow Jesus they abandoned Him. **They wanted all of the benefits of following Jesus without any of the cost.**
 - Listen, following Jesus...trusting Jesus in the day to day of life is hard. And let’s be honest the teachings of Jesus are hard, counter-cultural, and extremely challenging.
 - **It’s hard when the romantic love in your marriage has faded and you’re tempted to leave your spouse and find that romantic love with someone else.**
 - But when we buy that lie we’re failing to take the gospel deeper than our desire for romantic love.
 - **It’s hard when you feel you’ve been wronged and you want to take things into your own hands to protect and defend your name.**
 - Again, when we let bitterness fill our hearts, then the gospel hasn’t gotten any deeper than our need to be respected and thought well of.
 - If when the heat gets turned up in my life I turn from my faith and follow my own desires then the condition of my heart is just like rocky soil and I’ve failed to take the gospel deep.
- **SLIDE:** Thorny Soil: Represents a heart that receives the word but soon is distracted or deceived by worldly things
 - Vs. 18-19, “*And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who 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 (the seed) proves unfruitful.*”
 - For many of us, if we’re honest, we understand just how easily it is to become distracted by the cares of the world and even deceived by the things of the world.
 - **SLIDE:** We become distracted and deceived by worldly things when we buy the lie that living for Christ means giving up something better...something greater.
 - Make no mistake, we must give something up...but it is not something greater.
 - **We give up a life of wandering in in the desert looking to every created thing to satisfy our thirst only to find we are drinking the sand.**
 - Illustration from Peter Park (West Club): Tom Brady is a perfect illustration of this
 - He was asked what he’s learned about himself after winning 3 Super Bowl rings.

- Brady: “Why do I have 3 Super Bowl rings, and still think there’s something greater out there for me?”
- The answer...because there is something greater!
- In living to Christ we gain something far greater. We gain an abundant and eternal life as a child of the very One who created us.
- Paul would say it this way, “Indeed, I count *everything* as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”¹
- Perhaps you’ve heard this quote by CS Lewis in his essay “The Weight of Glory”, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”²

Now, as Jesus describes each of these first three ‘heart conditions’ we realize that the problem is always the same! The problem isn’t the sower or the quality of the seed. The problem is that that seed isn’t going deep enough.

In other words, if when we evaluate our lives we find ourselves identifying with the first three soils then the problem is that the word, the gospel, isn’t getting into the deepest recesses of our souls and taking root. We’ve got to press the word deep.

Lest you get really discouraged: CHANGE IS POSSIBLE –Jesus shows us that there’s a soil that receives the word and brings forth a God-sized harvest.

- SLIDE: Fruitful soil: Represents a heart that both hears and accepts the word.
 - Vs. 20, “But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it (underline that!) and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and hundredfold.”

They “hear and accept” the word. In other words, we play an active role in driving the gospel deep. I love how Tim Keller said this,

- SLIDE: “The gospel doesn’t do something in you without you.”
- What he meant by that is that we are not passive participants in our faith. We have to actively push the gospel deeper and deeper into our lives.

Illustration:

¹ Philippians 3:8-11

² C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, and Other Addresses

Bonhoeffer who suffered mightily yet persevered amidst tremendous opposition and suffering wrote the following in his book The Cost of Discipleship.

- *“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.”*
- **SLIDE: The gospel we need to save us is the same gospel we need to sustain us!** The more we go back to the gospel (over and over and over again as Bonhoeffer would say) the more beautiful and delightful Jesus becomes to us...and that will change our motivation for everything!

Illustration: Alex and Gummy Bear Song

- Our youngest son has autism
- We were encouraged to utilize an iPad, which would help with his fine motor skills, and there are also lots of apps that can help him develop cognitively.
- And periodically we would go to YouTube to listen to children’s songs that he seemed to enjoy and it wasn’t long before we discovered the gummy bear song.
- If you don’t know anything about the gummy bear song and want to be tortured and come dangerously close to having a seizure, then you ought to Google it. If you have heard it then you know at first it’s catchy but after the 3rd time you want to through your iPad out the window.
- Amazingly it’s been viewed over 370 million times on YouTube and I’m convinced that my son is at least 50 million of them.
- Here’s the thing: There is inexpressible joy and delight for my son when he watches that video which is why he asks for it over and over again.
- **If we want a staying faith then we must go to the gospel again and again which is the source of inexpressible joy and delight.**

The next logical question is ‘how’? How do I drive the gospel deep?

Application: **SLIDE: To have a ‘staying faith’ we must constantly apply the means of grace God has given us to drive the gospel deep.**

Means of Grace (Ways given by God to drive the gospel deep):

1. **SLIDE: Prayer**
 - a. **SLIDE: “Prayer and praise are the oars by which a man may row his boat into the deep waters of the knowledge of Christ.”** Spurgeon
2. **SLIDE: Scripture intake / memory (II Timothy 3:16-17)**
 - a. II Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*
 - b. Joshua 1:8, *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night that you might be willing to observe*

everything that is written it, for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success."

- c. Psalm 119:11, *"I will hide your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*
3. **SLIDE:** Community
 - a. Community is the context for change!
 - b. "We will not know God, change deeply, nor win the world apart from community."³
 - c. It's in community that all the 'one another's' of Scripture are lived out. This is precisely why small groups are so important to us.
4. **SLIDE:** Generosity (II Corinthians 8:9)
 - a. II Corinthians 8:9, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*
 - b. Through our generosity we are declaring our hope is in Christ and not the things of this world.
5. **SLIDE:** Ordinances
 - a. Baptism
 - b. Lord's Supper
 - i. Look to the future: Anticipating His return forward to His return
 - ii. Look to the present: Examining our lives now
 - iii. Look back to the past: Reflecting on His body being broken and blood being poured out.

Before we pray and prepare our hearts to receive the Lord's Supper, let me share this last thought with you.

In John 12, following the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and before being offered up to be crucified, Jesus said to his disciples (don't miss this), *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."*

If the seed goes down into the ground and dies...it will bear much fruit. This is exactly what Jesus did for us.

I heard a pastor say, "In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was agonizing over what was to come and cries out to God and says 'is there any other way'? **The answer from heaven was "My life cannot be released into them unless you become a seed. Unless you go into the ground and die...And he did! He became a seed that goes into the ground and dies."**

³ Tim Keller, Gospel In Life.

And through dying...power was released...for following His death came resurrection. He did so willingly that through Him we might have life and life abundant.

So Summit Church, which type of soil are you and what is God leading you to do?

- Hard Soil: Perhaps today he's leading you to surrender your life to him for the very first time.
- Rocky Soil: Confronted with hardships and today God is leading you to trust Him and His design for you life. reminding you that when the hardships come that He can be trusted.
- Thorny Soil: Or perhaps you've seen today that you've become distracted and deceived by the things of the world and today's Jesus has reminded you that He really is better.
- Fertile Soil: Stop and give thank recognizing that He receives all the praise, glory and honor.

Regardless of where we are, my prayer is we will take a step of faith and experience afresh and anew the grace and mercy of God. And through the means of Grace God has provided drive the gospel deep into your soul and bear, much fruit!

Prayer.