

**Mark 4: 26-29; “The Earth Yields Crops by Itself”, Sermon # 24 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 5th, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.**

Are you a part of the kingdom of God? Do you have the blessed seed of the word of God residing in your heart? For that is what this particular parable is speaking of. It is speaking of the evidence that you can see, and the evidence that others can see, that a real work of grace is taking place in your heart. The whole kingdom of God is like this. Every believer is like this. The question that each of us must ask ourselves is this: Is there really the evidence in my heart, in my words, and in my deeds to prove that grace has been planted in my heart? The follow-up question is: Is there evidence that I am making progress toward maturity in the faith I now possess? If I am a true Christian I want to be pleasing to God in an increasing way. How can I know that I am truly growing in Him? All through my Christian life, the earth (that is my own heart, the good heart that listens to the word of God and acts upon it) will be yielding crops by itself. It is this phrase that I want to examine more carefully with you so that we might all understand something more about the conversion and growth of a believer in Jesus Christ. What does it mean that the earth yields crops by itself? 3 points of interest in this regard. 1st - There is a mystery in the way that the word of God sprouts and grows in a believer's heart that is not known to the one who preaches to him. 2nd- There is a progression of growth in a true Christian's heart and life that ought not to be overlooked, by anyone looking at that Christian. And 3rd- There is a particular time when each Christian is ripe for harvest, which is known only to the Lord. Let us prayerfully consider each of these points.

1st of all – There is a mystery in the way that the word of God sprouts and grows in a believer's heart that is not known to the one who preaches to him.

Now how do we interpret the particular word pictures of this parable in light of the fact that we do have a God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is intimately concerned in every aspect of my salvation from beginning to end? How can the earth of my heart “yield crops by itself?” Don't people need God to live the Christian life? Don't they need preachers to explain to them the word of God? Well, they most certainly do. We know that we cannot do anything which is spiritual or pleasing to God without our Lord Jesus Christ and His grace. In John 15: 4 Jesus says, “Abide in Me, and I in you.” “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” This same truth is told to us plainly in a number of texts of Scripture. An example is found in 1 Corinthians 4: 7 which says, “For who makes you to differ from another?” “And what do you have that you did not receive?” If this is true, and it most certainly is, then how does the believer bring forth crops himself? He does so, I believe by deliberately acting upon the word of God which has been preached to him. The believer must have God's grace, and he very much needs the preaching of the word of God to his heart; but he also needs to see that God expects him to work the ground of his heart. He expects every believer to yield a good crop to Him according to all that has been given to him. “To whom much is given, much will be required.” How does this come about? Every believer is saved entirely by God's grace.

Let us remember that every believer lives and does everything that they do, by grace. Nevertheless, they are also fully responsible to cultivate the ground of their heart to bring forth good things for God and for Christ. The answer to the question of God's sovereignty and my responsibility is that I must learn to take the initiative in keeping God's word alive in my Christian life even though I know that I am utterly dependent upon God in order to make progress in my faith and my obedience. My obedience begins by my deliberately accepting and

receiving the word of God preached to me. After I hear the preaching, I go back to it when I am alone, and I read it, and I confirm it. And then I go about to do it. I am most decided and deliberate about this. It is my choice in relation to all the grace that has been given to me by my Savior. The man “scattering seed upon the ground” in verse 26, “does not know” how the seed should sprout and grow in the heart of the believer. I believe that this is referring to the minister, the one who preaches the word of God to other people, believers or unbelievers, who does not understand the work of God in the human heart. He is Christ’s ambassador, but He does not understand himself how the Lord does His blessed work. It is too wonderful for him to comprehend. He is simply being faithful to what God has called him to do. He scatters the truths of the gospel and the good word of God upon the hearts of the people that he preaches to; he goes home and goes to bed, having prayed over his labors of the day. He rises up on Monday morning and prays that all of those dear people that he has preached to, will retain in their hearts the precious truth of the word of God. He prays that it will be a living and growing thing in their hearts, and that it will change them to the glory of God. But he himself does not know how God will work in their hearts. It is a mystery in many ways. How does the truth sprout and grow in a believer’s heart?

In applying this; you need to understand that your faith and your making progress in your faith, is connected to the minister, the man who is preaching the good word of God to you. God has placed him there in your life for your good and for your growth. The minister would have you to be a living plant and growing up into maturity in the Lord. Week by week he will be preaching many seasonable truths for your soul. The word will be falling upon your heart, and the minister will be attempting to faithfully bring it to you. But your faith and your maturity ultimately do not rest upon him, or upon his ability to preach, but upon the word of God and God Himself applying that word to your soul. The question that you should ask yourself is this. Am I so cultivating the ground of my heart that the word of God will be planted, and will grow and bear fruit unto God? Am I tending to the cultivation of spiritual truth in relation to having fellowship with my blessed Savior? Each of us needs to see that we have a responsibility to “yield crops unto God”. “Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns,” it says in Jeremiah 4: 3. Do not let the ground of your heart become hard and thereby neglect the cultivation of all the grace and truth that you have been given. The Holy Spirit is right there with you, dear believer. What can be grown upon your heart if it is insensitive to the cause of God, the cause of His righteousness and truth advancing in your soul? If you neglect the pursuit of righteousness, if you neglect reading your Bible, if you neglect prayer, it will weaken you as a Christian and you will not bear as much fruit as you could if you were deliberate about it.

“Do not sow among the thorns.” We have already seen in the previous parable that the thorns are the people who hear the word of God, but “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.” Look at your heart and examine it to see if the word of God is dwelling richly in it. Do you have a sweet winsome spirit that loves to have communion with Christ there in your heart; or are your mind and heart wholly occupied with the things of the world and earthly riches; making money and accumulating possessions; as if a man's heart consisted in the abundance of his possessions? How can you serve God and money? And how can you bear fruit with the cares of the world upon you continually? No, a Christian mindset is a different mindset from the world’s. The mature believer is found every day cultivating the ground of their heart.

Now 2ndly - There is a progression of growth in a true Christian’s heart and life that ought not to be overlooked by anyone looking at that Christian. (Verse 28)

“For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, and after that the full grain in the head.” It is very important that you and I understand that God does not see things the way that a man sees them. “Men look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the

heart.” A Christian who would be mature and discerning must get beyond this. I think that it is very easy for Christians as they look at each other and evaluate each other’s lives and service to Christ, to make great mistakes. It is very possible to mistake natural physical and mental gifts and abilities for spiritual maturity, and thus not really understand what growth in the Christian life is all about. Many times, I think, Christians are fooled by the appearance of things. They looking at a person who has great talent that has been given to them. They see that this person has great intelligence and that they are able to impress others with the strength of their mind and their insights on all kinds of issues. Another person that they look at has great gifts and abilities in organization and business. They are easily able to see how to make money or to get things done. And these gifts and abilities, because they are integrally linked to success in doing and accomplishing things, may lead to a wrong conclusion. The conclusion may be, that if a person is intelligent and perceptive, that they are therefore mature and wise. The conclusion may be that if a man can get things done and can make money that he is therefore also a spiritual leader. These conclusions are not correct in God’s sight. It is not personal gifts and abilities that make a person wise and holy. It is their personal graces which are given to them by Christ, and carefully cultivated, that lead them to be wise, and holy, and loving, and giving, and serving. When this principle is understood, it is then, and then alone, can lasting fruit be born to the glory of God. Then, and then alone, is a person truly useful to Him in service. Otherwise, it is all about me, and not about God and Christ.

“The earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.” The blade of the plant comes first in the process of fruit-bearing. This is what is seen and it ought not to be despised. A young Christian has many things to grapple with in himself before he can really bear fruit to God. Some Christians are going to be faster, and some are going to be slower, in their grappling with themselves. Speed is not the issue so much in the Christian life. It is the enjoyment of God; seeing what He would have you to learn as you run the race, that is the issue. Turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 9, verse 10, for a moment. How should you go about your work as a Christian? You should go about it, “as unto the Lord”, and also with this principle in mind. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” “I returned and saw under the sun that – the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.” “For man does not know his time.” Man doesn’t know his time is totally in the hands of God. It doesn’t matter how swift, how strong, how wise or intelligent he is. These are not the real issues.

But diligence, the Preacher commends. Diligence in what, you might ask? Diligence in whatever your hand finds to do in an earthly sense. Diligence in whatever your heart finds to do spiritually, as well. For your heart and your work are linked together. “Guard your heart with all diligence for from it flow the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4: 23) Turn over to that verse with me. Our translation, the New King James says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” This is a description of “the blade” of the plant of righteousness which grows out of the believer’s heart and manifests itself in his life. This is what the blade looks like. Verse 24 – “Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.” “Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you.” “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established.” “Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.” You see how deliberate this is; how purposeful the thoughts of the heart and mind must be, by the grace of Christ, to accomplish this? This is the blade of fruit-bearing. It is the desire and full resolution to walk the path of righteousness, to turn away from evil, and to “ponder the path of your feet.” Where are you going with your Christian life? How is God to be served by you?

If we were to take the time, and read through chapter 5 we would find warnings against the strange woman; the woman who chooses the lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and not being faithful to one man in marriage. It is a warning to all young men to remove their way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house. In our day it would also be a warning against pornography which comes through your television and your computer. How are we to do battle against such seductions when our whole society, young and old, are being polluted by it? How are we to be pure and chaste sexually in the midst of a perverse generation? Verse 7 of Chapter 5 says, "Therefore here me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth." "Remove your way far from her." That is the only way forward to bear fruit for God. Listen to the good word of God. Verse 15 of that same chapter. "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well." "Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?" "Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you." "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth." This is way that that we begin to bear fruit to God. It is to have pure desires for pure and holy things; not for strange flesh. In Chapter 7, the same subject comes up again. And the answer is given again. "My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you." "Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye." There is fruit born in what you choose to look at, in what you desire for yourself, and what you deliberately choose to do in relation to keeping the commandments of God. It will make all the difference in the world as time goes by. That is where the power to bear fruit unto God begins. It begins with keeping His commandments and really learning to live by faith in His word; not going back to the world and the lusts of the flesh to see how much we can hold on to. The obedience of the believer may be inconsistent at many points and there may be many things that he doesn't understand about what God has called him to. But as David says in 2 Samuel 23, verse 5, "Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure." "For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?"

Then after the appearance the blade, which is the first appearance of graces at work in the Christian life, comes the head of grain; the beginning of the real fruit which is visible both to God and man. Only God can see clearly how He intends to bring us along in our experience from the first to the second stage of our Christian life. How does the Christian grow up from a babe into an adult who is able to bear more responsibilities and fulfill more duties, and to really do things that will glorify Him? It happens by his being shown more about Himself and more about Christ. The Lord generally uses oppositions and disappointments in relation to our most cherished dreams in order to help us to see how we can indeed bear fruit to him. It is because we want success in the Christian life on our own selfish terms that God brings these things. However, if we have been making progress in doing God's will, by demonstrating right attitudes and a right heart, doing things from pure motives; then God will sometimes test the believer by giving them the success that they desire in order to see if they can remain humble and prayerful in that state, being content to serve Him in abundant labors. Whether it is opposition and disappointment, or whether it is success and advancement, God tests the heart and the mind of the Christian to see what will be useful to Him. In order to bear fruit unto God and to have that fruit remain a Christian must be brought to see that the fruit of righteousness does not come from himself, but that it does involve many graces which he must develop in the sight of God and men in order to be righteous. "The earth yields crops by itself."

We see an example of this in the book of Job, Chapter 35. Job was a righteous man fearing God and turning away from evil. But because of the onslaughts of Satan against him, Satan gaining permission from God that his children, his possessions, and his health should all be taken away from him, he came to think that God was against him. He was justifying himself because he knew that he had not sinned so as to bring these trials upon himself. But he did not justify God. And so Elihu in 35: 1 says this. "Do you think that this is according to justice?" "Do

you say, ‘my righteousness is more than God’s?’ “For you say, ‘What advantage will it be to You?’ “What profit shall I have, more than if I had sinned?” “I will answer you and your friends with you.” “Look at the heavens and see; and behold the clouds – they are higher than you.” “If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him?” “And if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?” “If you are righteous, what do you give to Him?” “Or what does He receive from your hand?” You see, Job had been righteous, but he had not learned how to overcome the evil one in this particular situation. This was what God wanted to prove; that Job was righteous, and that the Devil was a liar. This is what God wants to prove in each Christian’s life in terms of their faith in Him, and their obedience to His word. He knows, O believer, how to do this in your life. Whether you pass or fail in your obedience to Him; will you end up justifying Him? Job did. And so will every true believer. We must confess and forsake our sins in all their particulars, and then we will find mercy, and then we will bear fruit. This is the head in the plant of fruit born to God. “I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.” “I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” When you overcome the evil one, then you can truly go on to bear lasting fruit for God. You are not living your Christian life to impress other Christians. You are not living your Christian life to impress God. He knows all your strengths and weaknesses, all your righteousness, and all of your sins. You are living your life being impressed by the grace and power of Christ to give you right motives and right attitudes in everything that you do and encounter in living your Christian life. You will be tested by God on a hundred different issues and questions to see what you will do, what you will say; whether you will hold fast His word or not; whether you will cling to Christ.

And 3rd – Let us consider that there is a particular time when each Christian is ripe for harvest which is known only to the Lord.

The third stage of the Christian’s life and the development of grace in him is the “the full grain in the head.” This is the last stage of the Christian life; the stage of harvesting the crops. All those who believe in Jesus must come to understand that they are a farmer for God. He has lent them their land and He has given them their seed. The crops that they grow on it, in their heart and in their life are going to be harvested as grain in a coming day. He is the Lord of the Harvest. They will be harvested in the day when He returns, the Day of judgment; this is certainly true. But they are also harvested toward the end of their life, when they come to die and even after their death in relation to all their labors. Death is just the beginning of the great harvest. And the crops that you yield up to God at the end of your life are the fruits of righteousness which came by Jesus Christ. He it was, by His blessed Holy Spirit, who worked in your heart and brought you to the place where you could be useful and fruitful to Him. This does have good effects on people around you. Perhaps some were converted by seeing your ministry of service; the many good works that you will have done in your life after conversion. Perhaps the lives of many people were influenced to consider and do the will of God because of what you said to them and how you lived before them. You gave all the glory to God and learned that doing His will was really all your pleasure. You learned the sport of holy competition in terms of doing good. You came to understand what Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy 6: 5, “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” “The hardworking farmer should be first to partake of the crops.” You have learned to sow to righteousness and to sow to the Spirit instead of your flesh. You have learned to work hard and diligently in the Lord’s work as well as you own. Now comes the reward at the end of your life. You have born much fruit and your fruit will remain.

Long before this, you learned the lesson which has done you in such good stead. It is the lesson of Hosea 14: 8: “Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I do anymore with idols?’ “I have heard and observed him.” “I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me.” “Who is wise?”

“Let him understand these things.” “Who is prudent?” “Let him know them.” “For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them.” And so, when this grain of the word of God bearing fruit in you is ripe, the Lord will know just when to take you home. He always knows when to put the sickle in, whether you are a young like David Brainerd or Jerusha Edwards who died in their youth, or whether you are the oldest believer, one who thinks that it would have been better to go home years before. No, the Lord knew what was best. Listen to what the Psalmist relates in Psalm 92 concerning a righteous life, a life of bearing fruit for God. Verse 4 – “For You, Lord, have made me glad through your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands.” “O Lord, how great are Your works!” “Your thoughts are very deep.” “A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this.” “When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever.” Then in verse 12: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” “Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.” “They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” So let us pray to glorify God whether we are young or old, because we do not know when the Lord will think that it is the right time to put the sickle in. Let us pray as the Psalmist did in Psalm 71: 17, “O God You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works.” “Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.” This is the full grain in the head. This man is ripe for heaven.