Rooted – Part 4

GROW DEEP, LIVE STRONG

# Harvest

## (2 Corinthians 9:6)

This is the final week of our series entitled “Rooted” and we’ve been learning a lot about what it means to be planted and how seeds need healthy soil to sink their roots into. We recognize that a seed is planted with the expectation it would take root and grow, yielding its fruit in season. And so, after the planting, cultivating, pruning and waiting, there is the harvest.

Today, in this last week, we’re going to talk about the harvest, and everyone wants to enjoy the fruit of their labors. That is what harvest time is about, but few are willing to do all that is necessary along the way. And yet the Scriptures tell us time and time again that we will reap what we sow. In second Corinthians we are told,

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

And so, this is a timeless principle, we believe it, it’s obvious and it makes sense. But one of the most difficult things about teaching the Word of God is knowing that I may sow into you, and you may hear it and understand it at a conceptual level, and not really understand it on a practical level. My concern is that the teaching of the Word of God can become so abstract that it doesn’t make a difference in our daily lives; like there was a famine in the land, not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing and understanding the Word of God. And for me that would be very defeating, because my greatest desire, my hope and my prayer is to give you something of substance that would feed you and strengthen your soul today. And so, I’m going to sow into you the Word of God, looking for a harvest, and believing that many of you have come expecting God to feed you today.

Jesus said it this way in John chapter 4, verse 34. He said,

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:34-35).

In the same way, I take teaching the Word of God very seriously, it satisfies me, because I see the fields are ripe for harvest. And my prayer is that you would leave here full as well, that you would be F.A.T. disciples. In other words, that each one of you would be Faithful, Available, and Teachable.

We’ve been in this series entitled “Rooted” and there have been a lot of agricultural terms and concepts that are not part of our modern vernacular. We just don’t talk that way and so my challenge is to bring you into the context of this Middle Eastern proverb so that you understand the principle behind the proverb because this is more than a cute saying, this is more than a hypothetical situation, this is the living, enduring, eternal Word of God. Jesus said,

"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest’” (John 4:35).

And so, I’m trying to take an ancient farming proverb they said but most of us never say, because we are not an agricultural society, and communicate to you the spiritual truth Jesus was intending to convey to his disciples.

In this passage, Jesus was referring to the four months between planting and harvesting and he is reminding us his disciples that the time between sowing the gospel and reaping saving faith may be very brief. And so, he is encouraging them to lift up their eyes, to look on the fields of lost people that are ripe for harvest, rather than being completely absorbed in their own physical needs, because they had just gone into town to buy food leaving Jesus alone at the well where he encountered the Samaritan woman.

When they returned with food they urged him, in verse 31,

“Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (John 4:31-32).

You see, context is so important, because every concept has a context, and it’s the context that brings clarity to the text.

I’ve been talking to you about the concept of the harvest and trying to give you the context so that we could make a practical application to our lives. And so, when I am sowing or casting out the seed of the Word of God, I am doing it with the hope of getting a response, because this is spiritual seed. The apostle Paul said in first Corinthians,

“Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest” (1 Corinthians 9:10).

My desire today is to bring you into the context because there may be some things in your life that are keeping you from reaping what God has promised you. And so, as I bring clarity to the Scriptures, I do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest, but first we must tear down the walls that are blocking your perspective and keeping you from possessing the promise.

Now, some of you grew up on a farm with acres of fields, taking care of animals every day, and you’ve had real farm experience. You understand plants and animals, seedtime and harvest, and so when you hear the word, “harvest” you recognize that you are about to reap what you have sown. You know that you have planted, you have sown, you have watered, and now God is about to do something in your life. But you also know that harvest time is the hardest part, it’s when you are waking up the earliest and going to bed the latest, because the potatoes are not going to dig themselves, the corn is not going to pick itself, the cows are going to milk themselves.

There is a process to all of this, there is an order in which things need to happen in our lives. And last week we talked about God being the gardener and how we need to trust him to know what is best and to do what he wants when he wants to do it. And so, we need to be careful not to get things out of order, too soon or too late. For example, my day starts so much better when I start by thanking God for what he has done. And so, if I wake up and I’ve got breath in my lungs, I praise him, I enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; giving thanks to him and praising his name, because there is an order of things (Psalm 100:4).

The Bible says it this way in Genesis chapter 8,

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:22).

And yet some of us are impatient and want to harvest stuff too soon; we want to pluck it up before it has time to take root and bear fruit, because we don’t know when to use what God has given us. And so, instead of waiting for the proper time, we end up ruining the very provision he gives, but Jesus described the order.

“He said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:26-29).

I wonder how many of you are staying up at night, stressing about stuff that if you would just get out of the way and let God deal with it you would be so much better off?

What I want to do today is dig into this Scripture, not being distracted by the surface level implications of this text but allowing God to open our eyes to see it in a different way. I want to go deeper under the surface, taking a moment to consider this parable and its meaning, recognizing that there are even greater things going on unseen below the surface. And this is what we have been seeing in this series, as we began scattering seed, growing, being pruned, and it all fits in the context of being rooted.

And so, Jesus describes this situation where the seed is being scattered on the ground. You may remember in part one, that we talked about the seed being scattered on the different soils, and Jesus is illustrating the idea that there is always seed going forth. It’s being scattered everywhere, God is always speaking, his Word is going out, the Gospel is going out, and his servants are sowing. In fact, the Bible says, that in the past God spoke at many times and in various ways, but in Hebrews chapter one, verse two it says,

“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2).

And it’s kind of weird, because we always pray, “God speak to me,” but we never shut up long enough to listen, we’re never still enough to hear what he has already said.

You see, the soil is our mind, our will, and our emotions and it’s often cluttered and sometimes it’s hardened. God has scattered the seed, but many of us have these birds, these little seed snatchers in our lives, busyness, concerns about people and things that distract you and grabbing your attention so that you don’t act on what you have heard. Others of us have gotten so good at collecting seed, we have a stash of seed, because we are really good at highlighting our Bibles, jotting down notes, but seed on the shelf without the application in the soil never bears fruit. In fact, many of us know way more than we need to know, we just need to do what we know. That’s why the Bible says,

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

In other words, you are not blessed by the Word you hear, but by the Word that you do. You and I already know enough, we know that we’re supposed to love others, considering others as more important than ourselves, not gossiping and talking about other people. We know that, but we’re resistant to the truth, and yet we always want to know more.

You see, many of us want to grow spiritually, but spiritual growth is a tricky concept, because we think that spiritual growth comes from attaining more knowledge. However, spiritual growth does not come from information, concepts, diagrams and charts; spiritual growth comes through application, it comes from doing the work, spiritual growth comes from on-the-job training. The Bible describes it this way,

“The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

One of the things that I regret in life is that I didn’t do what I knew I should have done many years ago. You see, I had plenty of knowledge, in fact, I had more seed that I knew what to do with.

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus said,

“A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how” (Mark 4:26-27).

And so, he scattered the seed on the ground, it’s not seed on the shelf, this isn’t seed in a bag, this is seed on the ground. And it’s that seed which is sown that matures, it sprouts and grows, though he doesn’t know how.

Now, today you and I can find out exactly how the seed grows, we can Google it, but Jesus was using this parable to get us beneath the surface to a deeper meaning. That’s why he began saying,

“This is what the kingdom of God is like…” (Mark 4:26).

And so, we are expecting something spectacular, something majestic, but he doesn’t describe it in any grandiose terms. He simply says,

“It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants” (Mark 4:31-32).

In hindsight we recognize that often when God is working the most in our lives it feels really insignificant and we don’t even know how. In fact, sometimes the greatest growth in our lives is not going to be on the surface, it’s not going to be an emotional experience or feeling, because often the deeper work that God will do is something so small, so seemingly insignificant, that it will be like the farmer who puts the seed on the ground not knowing when he will see it again.

This is why the apostle Paul tells us that we must,

“Live by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

You see, just like the farmer can plow the ground, plant the seed, and water the seed, there is another element of faith that is so important. And this is really the starting place of our spiritual growth, because we have a role to play in our relationship with God, we must humble ourselves and admit I don’t know how. Sometimes this is the most spiritual thing you can say.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus looking for answers, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus asked,

"How can a man be born when he is old" (John 3:4)?

When Jesus told the disciples, “I am going to prepare a place for you. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said,

“Lord, we don't know where you are going, so HOW can we know the way?" (John 14:2-5).

And so, that is the starting place, to admit, “I hear what you are saying, but I don’t know how.” I don’t know how to forgive somebody who has hurt me or hurt my child. I just don’t know how.”

Jesus said, the kingdom is just like that, the farmer scatters the seed but he doesn’t know how they grow. And our spiritual growth is like that, there is a role that you play, you know how to plow, you know how to plant, but you don’t know how it grows. It’s a mystery of the kingdom and that’s why the Bible says,

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world” (1 Corinthians 1:20)?

And so, God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things to shame the strong, and he’s looking for men and women who are humble enough to admit they don’t know how. Not those who are wise by human standards, but those who have a “I don’t know how” kind of heart. That is who God is looking to use in his kingdom, because you don’t have to know how, you just need to know who.

You see, we can’t let what we don’t know keep us from sowing. The farmer didn’t know how it was going to happen, but he knew what he had to do. He knew that he had to keep sowing and yet there are some of you who have stopped sowing, stopped praying, stop showing up because you didn’t know how, but you don’t have to know how. You have got to be like Abraham, who the Bible tells us,

“When called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).

You see, he didn’t have to know how, because he knows who.

Jesus said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground” (Mark 4:26).

There are some of you who are waiting to know how before you scatter the seed and you’ve got it out of order. You can’t make it rain or make the sun shine, but the greatest growth happens when the seed is planted. It’s got to be sown, this is part of the mystery of the kingdom, there is a cooperation between what we can do, what we can control, and what God does that is unseen.

In first Corinthians, the apostle Paul says it this way in chapter 3,

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

You see, life and growth is a mystery, it’s a divine operation. Jesus said it this way in John chapter 3,

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit of God” (John 3:8).

You see, not one of us contributes to the growth, all we can do is scatter seed. Only God makes things grow, but the seed itself is full of potential. The Bible says,

“The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

It’s the power of God, it’s a divine operation, it’s a mystery hidden behind-the-scenes, in the dark and under the soil.

This parable is powerful, it appears simple on the surface, but it carries a deeper meaning. On a deeper level, the picture that Jesus is painting is of something that hasn’t happened yet, it’s prophetic, because in John chapter 12, verse 24, Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24).

Jesus stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman government silent as a sheep before the shearers. He allowed those accusations to be heaped on him even though he was innocent, because he knew that he had a purpose to fulfill.

He stood silently before those who accused him, condemned him, and sentenced him to die. He could have stopped it, he could’ve called for legions of angels to rescue him, but this is what he came for. And so, he stood there in silence until they forced him down and nailed him to the cross where he died taking the blame of your accusations and your shame. He bore your punishment so that you could go free and then they took him down from the cross and laid him in the grave, but he wasn’t buried, he was planted. You see, three days later the tomb was empty, when he was laid in the grave it wasn’t over, it was just beginning, because this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, this is what the kingdom of God is like.

You see, Jesus is the resurrection and the life and he was planted with the expectation of a great harvest. The fields are ripe, and so my prayer is that this Word is getting into your heart and into your spirit because God is going to use it to accomplish what he sent it to do. I don’t know how, because his ways are higher than my ways, and his thoughts higher than my thoughts. I just have to scatter the seed, because I know who. You see, Jesus is the seed, he is the Word of God, and he was planted for three days and his resurrection gives us an expectation of greater things. We don’t need to know how, we need to know who,

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

I pray that this message would be really practical and that you would be able to take something from it for your life. I don’t believe it’s supposed to be a mystery, but it’s supposed to be prophetic, which means that you need to receive this word personally. There is a harvest coming, this seed is for you, but it needs to be sown or else it’s just another seed, just another message. And so, I hope you’ll understand that God has set you free of the expectation to understand, you don’t need to know how, because obedience is your job, and so you just need to do what you know and remain rooted. God bless you!

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