

Mark 4:7, 4:18-19 Week 3: The crowded heart

⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

God's giving them good seed, but the condition of the heart that determines the lack of harvest. The seed that grows among thorns sprouted, and came up, but the thorns around it choked it, so that it was not fruitful. Because of the competition for light and nourishment, could not produce any grain.

The explanation--¹⁸ And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Things enter in--The hearts last week were full of stony soil, since the hearts didn't cooperate with God's plan in digging out the rocks that were sin hindering spiritual growth. This week we're going to talk about threats to our spiritual walk, our life in Christ that come from outside. Notice Jesus' words here, He says that other things *enter in and choke the word*. Enter in. This threat to our Christian walk is from things that belong outside our heart, that we let get a hold of us, and get a hold on our heart. Jesus mentions specific things not to give place to in our hearts.

Thorns are part of the curse.--So, since the seed's the same, what's different here? It's the thorns. The first time the word thorns is used in the Bible is in Genesis chapter 3, verses 17-19. Now remember that God's plan was that He would provide for us in the Garden. That He would provide everything we need, without labor on our part. But when Adam ate the fruit, then came the Curse. Thorns are part of the curse on the ground that it would produce thorns and thistles while Man was cursed to have to work, to labor in order to produce bread to feed our families. And, it's this same kind of "I Did It My Way" rebellious attitude that causes Christians who should know better, to ignore the Holy Spirit's urging to follow God's plan for our lives, and instead seek out other things, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. To seek out other things to put first in our lives, to worship instead of God. In the time of Jeremiah, God had warned Israel about how they had drifted away from Him, in Jer. 4:4 saying **3 For this is what the Lord says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up your uncultivated ground, And do not sow among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord And remove the foreskins of your hearts, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,**. God wanted to provide living water for these men, but they refused and wanted to try to do it themselves. We have to keep God at the center of our lives, trusting Him to guide us, and to provide for us, relying on His Living Water, Running Water, instead of muddy old water in cisterns that leak, and then run out of water entirely. We have to stay the course; we have to keep the faith over the long years. **Thorns grow slowly-** insidiously. If you take your eyes off God, and begin to follow other things, you don't just stay where you're at. Untended gardens don't just stay like they are if you stop weeding them—any lack of diligence and the weeds and thorns start growing immediately to choke out the plants. Thorns or tares are going to come up to try to choke the wheat. In fact, even among the good wheat trying to produce a crop, there will always be some thorns or tares. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the wheat and the tares or weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. We see that having to deal with those persons or things that are trying to distract us from God is inevitable, so we must be on-guard against their work, as they try to pull us away from God. Those who aren't following God closely will always present a potential danger for Christians, which is why it's good practice to surround yourself with Christians as your close friends, if you expect to live out your life as a Christian. The Bible is clear: 1 Cor 15:33 **33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."** If we associate with the ungodly, with those who have life-styles that aren't in accordance with God's Word, then we will be adversely influenced by them. The truth is that false teachings do not lead to holiness. As such, it is critical that we are careful whom we form relationships with, especially those outside the church because unbelievers can cause even the strongest Christians to waver in their faith and adversely affect their walk with Christ and their witness to the world. Paul warns us not to take up the lifestyles of corrupt people—those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. **1 Cor 6:9-10 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, 10 nor**

thieves, nor the greedy, nor those habitually drunk, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Paul knew how easy it is for people to be influenced by such adverse teachings. When we associate with or take delight in the company of people with worldly morals, we run the risk of mimicking their behaviors, their language, and their habits. Before long we are no longer of Christ, but of the world with its denial of absolute authority, its rejection of the Bible as the Word of God, and its ideology of relative morality. The process of these distractions gaining a hold on our heart can be slow, insidious.

First: the Worries of the World. Now how many know that throughout the Bible, whether it's David in Psalm 23, or our Shepherd Jesus speaking, followers of God are pictured as sheep?

Well what's wrong with this picture is that no-one in their right mind would try to pull a wagon with little wooly sheep. They wouldn't get very far! Sheep are not burden bearing animals. It's no accident that the Bible calls **God's people the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.** (Psalm 95:7). We're not supposed to be laden down with burdens.

Recipe for Peace--In Philippians 4:66 **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.** Be anxious for nothing. The idea is to avoid care that consumes the attention. It's a command Paul is giving from God to us, --"You now, be anxious for nothing!" By itself, this would be a hard command to follow. As adults when we see a child with not a care in the world, we think Good for Them! They don't understand yet that the world is full of worries. It's helpful here to think of why the children aren't worrying. They're not worrying, because they are provided for! Their parents provide everything that they need—food, clothing, shelter, love. If we will just trust God and know that He loves us and wants what is best for us, then we can release this burden of worry and anxiety about what's going to happen next God provides for us spiritually by taking away our burden of worry and anxiety. In Mathew 6: picking up in verses 28-30, **Jesus puts it like this: 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!** This is what Jesus was talking about when He asked us to come to Him as a little child! This is childlike faith—trusting in God's provision. God asks us each day in a new way "do you trust Me". And a childlike faith responds "Father, Abba, I trust you". Cast all your cares on Him, for he cares for you. **Deceitfulness of riches--**One of the lies that we tell ourselves is that if we only had more money, it would make our life in Christ easier. And logically this may make sense, I mean if we didn't have to worry about money and stuff, and how we're going to make ends meet, it seems like we'd have less distractions, right? But what usually happens is that riches make a Christian walk harder. In Mathew 19:24 **Jesus said Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."** Does it sound like an easy task? In fact, it's not only a difficult task, Jesus says that **But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** Matt 19:26. So Jesus is telling us that riches make it more difficult, not less difficult to run our race. But remember that we're talking about things entering in our heart, getting between us and God and choking out our fruitfulness. So riches are a danger, but it's their deceitfulness that is the problem here. Riches give us a false sense of security. When we're supposed to be asking God to **Give us each day our daily bread**, we want to store up grain. And what happens? Since we have so much, there's no need to come to God daily to ask!! Then we start relying on ourselves instead of God. Riches give us a false sense of security. We should all remember the words of Paul to Timothy in 1 **Timothy 6:17-Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.** And that Jesus cautioned us in Luke 12:15 to Then He said to them, "**Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.**" If we keep God on His throne in our hearts, then we, like Paul can learn to be content whether we have much or little and learn to keep leaning on God to provide. **Desires for other things--**

Desires for other things. Desires for other things besides the Kingdom of God, besides doing God's will. Have you ever asked yourself WHY you want something that you want? I find that when I examine my motivations, I find all sorts of interesting things there. Sometimes I want things because I need them. That's o.k., if I really do need them, but I find that I can talk myself into "needing" things that I really don't need! As I look at desires in my own life that can distract from the Kingdom, I find many things that I have to be careful of. First, I think that I'm susceptible to putting people in my life in a higher place than they should be sometimes. Even good things, if they're put ahead of God in my heart, are no longer good things. As a father, I find that I must always look to God, not to my family as my Support, Guide and Helper. Even good things like family, can become an idol if we look to them instead of God. I want to serve my family, but in order to serve my family BEST, I must serve God FIRST. In Luke 14:16-20 Jesus tells a parable of the Kingdom, and likens God to a 16 But He said to him, **"A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a [j]piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'** There will always be excuses like needing to pay attention to our real estate or bottom line, like our work life, or like our relationships, but we can't let any of these things distract us from God's work. What is the result? All of these things choke the word. **Choke the word**--As we see all of the cares of the world, or what's happening with the economy, or what's going on on Facebook, and we dwell on these things, we let these things dominate our thinking. We find ourselves spending a lot of our time and resources on these things and neglect the Word of God, and our Relationship with God. All of these things on TV or on the internet become bigger in our minds than the things that God would have us focus on, and making things of the world the priority takes God off His throne in our lives. It de-emphasizes the importance of what God has to say and crowds out the influence in our lives that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God should have. **Becomes unfruitful**--We allow all of these things to interfere with the process of sanctification, the process that God wants us to cooperate with, the process of separating us to service to God, and since the (super) natural result of sanctification is to produce fruit, this distraction, these wrong priorities cause us to become unfruitful. **Impedes our walk**--They also impede our walk. Weeds in our life can impede, can interfere with our walk. As an example, I have a particularly nasty type of weed in my front yard that I'm trying to eradicate. I have got some goat heads in my lawn, and I can tell you from personal experience, that when I step on one, it impedes my physical walk, and similarly keeping these weeds in our life impairs our spiritual walk. So what is the answer? **Weed the garden**We need to weed out the garden. Cooperate with God in weeding out all of the things that are a distraction and impede our walk with Him. Hebrews 12:1-2 when it tells us to: Remove encumbrance--The author of Hebrews urges us: Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.