

## ***Making Disciples Who Make Disciples***

Ministry year 2021-2022

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXT: Mark 4:1-20**



Good morning, Beloved. We continue this morning in our series on discipleship and the importance of generosity, sacrifice and service. This Memorial Day we honor those who have given their lives in our nation's wars. May their service and sacrifice not be in vain. May our discipleship and our giving and our service, our sacrifice, also prove fruitful.

We look this morning at a parable of Jesus. It's Jesus' opening parable. When you hear a parable from Jesus, it will be a short story. It seems so simple, really, when you hear it. It seems obvious, and yet Jesus' parables have a way, in these short stories, of working into our imagination. They penetrate our heart defenses. They come inside of us, and they challenge us at the core of our being. That's what happens in a parable. Parables, as I've said before, are not Aesop's fables. They are not moralistic stories. They are prophetic confrontations. So I want to warn you up front that this is a dangerous parable. It's a dangerous parable because it will challenge us deep within. It has a way—this short parable—of assessing whether or not the Kingdom of God, the commitment to making disciples of all nations, is really the priority of my life or not, and this parable will reveal it. It is a challenging parable.

Why do we listen to Jesus' parables today? You may be new to Kenwood. You may be new in pursuing after Christ. I love to remind people that one of the amazing features of the Bible is that we have the words of Jesus reliably transmitted over time. Hundreds of thousands of people faithfully copied Jesus' Word over the centuries, and those words have been transmitted to us so that we have them. People whose names we do not know translated them from Greek into the languages of our heart, and we can read them. Sometimes skeptics will say,

“We don't really know what Jesus said.” That's not true. We actually do know what Jesus said, and we have those words before us. When we listen to Jesus' words, which He will invite us to do this morning, even though they prove challenging, in the end, if we receive them, our lives will burst forth with fruitfulness.

Let's listen this morning to this parable. It's called the Parable of the Sower. I want us to hear the Parable of the Sower together, and then, secondly, I want to focus our attention on a very potent threat, a very specific threat, that causes or can cause our lives to be unfruitful, to be stagnant, to be stale. Finally, I want us to look at, and even propose to you, a life-giving solution to this dangerous threat. Can we go on that journey together? Let's hear the parable. Let's focus on a very potent threat that we all face, and then let's see if the Lord opens up a life-giving solution. Let's go.

The parable is set as Jesus is teaching beside the sea, the Sea of Galilee, that large inland lake. The crowds were so large that Jesus had to teach from a boat, stepping back from the shore. Jesus got into the boat, and He sat in it. There He is, sitting in the boat a little from the shore, and the crowd gathered along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which forms a natural amphitheater up from the shoreline, so people can hear. Jesus was teaching them many things, and He told this parable, this story: “A sower went out to sow.” Sowing seed in the first century was done with a broadcast toss. I have a Speedygreen spreader at my house that I use to cast seed, because I'm unskilled at tossing. If you've ever tried to plant grass or sow something, you know this is a trained move. If you're unskilled, then you drop large clumps of seed in piles. This



sower, though, is experienced, and he goes out to sow, an image that people would recognize and know. In the parable, our attention gets focused on the seed. The seed is critical. The seed is critical because the seed leads to bread, and bread leads to life.

Having enough to eat is a matter of life and death in much of the world today.



It's connected directly to human experience today. It's connected directly to human experience in our city today. The seed leads to life. As we listen to the parable, we hear that some of the seed falls on the path, this hard, well-worn area, in the midst of the field, and the seed rests on the path. It cannot penetrate into the soil, and, as it's sitting there, the seed is vulnerable. We wonder in the story what will happen to the seed. The birds come because they know that there's nutritional value in the seed, and they eat up. For the hearers of the story, there's no grain.

There is life for the birds, but none for us.

The story continues, and we again focus our attention on the seed. Some of the seed falls on rocky ground. There's not much soil—just a very thin layer. The seed that lands in the midst of the rock has only one direction to go, and that is up. These are the early adopters, if you will, and they shoot up. Then, as we look with joy, our joy turns to sorrow, because, when the sun rises, the seed is scorched, and it withers. It has no root. It has no sustaining power for adverse conditions, and it withers and dies, and again there's no grain.



Other seed in the parable falls among thorns, and this seed germinates and starts to grow. Then all of a sudden in the parable, the thorns grow up rapidly around it. It's thistle, which is a rapidly growing weed, difficult to exterminate. Several years ago, I went through a birdwatching phase. I want to be clear, this parable is not an anti-bird parable. There are a lot of birds around this area, different types and varieties. One of the birds that I particularly enjoyed for their color and flightpath was the goldfinch. Goldfinches have a really unique flight pattern, and they also are strikingly beautiful, and they love thistle seed. I thought, "Perfect. I'm going to set up a dedicated feeder in the backyard and fill it with thistle seed." I did, and the goldfinches came, and they swooped in, and they ate, and they were feasting, and all was wonderful and blissful. Then I noticed, throughout my flowerbeds, that the goldfinches, having eaten some of the seed and not digesting it, dropped that thistle seed all throughout our property. I found myself waging a three-year battle with the thistle, from which I have emerged victorious. But when you pull thistle plants up, they're sharp, number one, which is slightly irritating. You pull them out of the ground, and they seem to snap off as if you've won. But it's very deceptive, because they break off at the root system, and the root remains and proliferates, so you pull one and four grow back.



The result in the parable is that the seed is unfruitful. I want you to feel in that detail what you're meant to feel, which is really a threat to your life. As the parable unfolds, this isn't a story about not having my favorite things at the grocery store. This is a parable about not having anything. This is a parable that, as it's told and more and more and more of the seed proves unfruitful, my life, your life, our life begins to be threatened.

Several years ago a group of us from Kenwood had the great privilege to go to North Africa with the intention of sharing Christ with Tunisian university students. This is a country where there are only about 300 Christians in the entire country, and yet there is a real openness among university students. But you can't come in and hold an open Christian meeting in a direct way. So our main resources for sharing the Lord were our testimonies. The interest of the Tunisians was to practice their English, so we could share Christ conversationally. It's really the same primary skill set that all of us need to have today in Cincinnati. Your testimony of what God has done in your life is such a safe entry point. Being willing to converse with other people about Christ's work in you opens doors. When we were there in Tunisia, in a different part of God's world, there were so many things to notice: different foods, wonderful foods, and the Christians who were there were really committed. One of the things that impressed me the most there was how sacred grain was, how important bread was. It was so important that if there was a scrap of bread that had fallen off a cart or a crust of a loaf that had fallen off a cart and was resting on the street or on the floor, you would see people come, and they would lift it up off the ground and set it on a ledge, because this was a community that was acquainted with famine. It was a community that was in touch with the reality that if the seed doesn't produce grain, then all of our lives are in danger, all of them.



increase of 30, 60, and a hundredfold. A typical yield, a best-case scenario yield, in the first century is

eight to tenfold. In Jesus' story, the seed germinates in what is a super-abundant harvest. It's a harvest unlike any story of the time. The drama and the tension of the parable that looks like we're all going to die, all of a sudden looks like we have enough to eat for ourselves and our families, our villages, our cities, and we even have enough to export!

The thorns choke it. It yields no grain. But some of the seed in the parable falls into good soil. It makes contact with the earth, and it germinates, which is a fantastic thing, isn't it? It germinates and



grows up, and in the parable it keeps growing. It increases. It reaches maturity, and it yields an absolutely astronomical



Disciple-making leads to exports. I don't want Kenwood Baptist Church to have a trade deficit. Do you? I want us to be a place where the Word of God is planted and cultivated and bursts

forth with so much life that we are gathering people in to feast with us, give it away, send it overseas. This cannot be a congregation that hoards the Word of God. It cannot be a community where we just try to eke out enough to survive. It cannot be a community where we just think carelessly about seed that proves unfruitful. This church is called, as a disciple-making church, to be a church where the Word of God is sown, and it germinates. We're going to have to look at each other and say, "We're going to need more baskets. Where can we give this grain away? Who is hungry in our community? Who is hungry in our city? Who is starving and almost ready to die in the world without access to the Word of God?" That's what I long for in this community. Do you want to see that? I'd like to see that.

Seeing that is not a foregone conclusion. Jesus' parable ends with this summons in Mark 4:9. It's an imperative to us:

*"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Isn't that a little bit of a strange ending? Jesus tells the story—the parable. It seems fairly straightforward, and Jesus ends by telling us all that, if you have ears, you have to use them. Do some of us not have ears? Do some of us not understand the parable? Jesus speaks the parable to the crowds, and then when He's alone, the twelve ask Him about it. When we look at the other Gospels, they invite Jesus to explain the parable. In Mark 4:11, Jesus says to them, to the disciples:

*"To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables."*

"Mystery" in the Bible is not like "mystery" in English. "Mystery" or "mysterious" in English is creepy, weird, dark, Gothic. "Mystery" in the Bible, in God's Kingdom, is God's will. It is used in Daniel and other places in the Old Testament, and the mystery of God's will is God's saving plan and purpose for the nations. The mystery of the Kingdom in Daniel is God's purpose to take a stone, cut without human hands, to topple the kingdoms of this world and to fill the earth with this Kingdom of God and invite all nations to it. Jesus is telling the disciples: "That's what I'm doing. It's been given to you, *but for those outside*," Jesus says, *"everything is in parables."*

If you look closely at Mark 4:12, Jesus says, *"So that,"* and then there are quotation marks. The quotation marks are not original. The Greek New Testament text has no punctuation. It's in all capital letters, no periods, no commas. You really have to know the language to read it. But the translators have put quotation marks here. Why? Because they recognize what Jesus' hearers would have recognized—that Jesus is quoting the Scripture:

*"So that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.'"*

Have you ever seen but not really seen? Some of you, if you think of a close friendship or your marriage, can draw on the profound experience of speaking, and you sense that someone is hearing, but they're not really understanding you. Have you ever had that happen? Once or twice?

Jesus' quote is from Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6 is one of the great passages in the Bible. It is a significant moment in the history of God's people. In Isaiah 6, it was a significant year in Israel. It was the year that King Uzziah died, the king who had reigned for decades. It was a time of uncertainty. What will happen? The king who has been reigning for decades is dead. What will happen? Isaiah goes into the temple, and he sees the Lord seated on a throne. He sees God high and lifted up. The train of His robe filled the temple, and above the Lord stood the seraphim, those fiery creatures ablaze with the glory of God, with six wings, two covering their faces, two covering their feet, two flying. The seraphim call out to one another a heavenly anthem of worship in Isaiah 6:3:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"*

That's what they're singing, and they never tire of singing it. Those words, Beloved, are the words that are written right underneath me here, because when we come to God, we come to a God who is holy. That's why we started this morning in singing of the holiness of God. That hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," is a missionary hymn. It was written by a British missionary in India, desiring that all the nations of the world would see the uniqueness and the glory and the holiness of the God of Israel. The seraphim are singing out *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts."* The foundation of the temple shakes, and Isaiah, like everyone in the Bible who sees the Lord in His glory, feels his own unworthiness, and Isaiah's personal response in Isaiah 4:5 is:

*"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*

You know, the greatest use of human lips and the organ of speech is to praise God. That's what our lips are for. Our lips, our mouth, our capacity to speak articulate speech is to praise the God who is worthy of our worship. And we don't use our words that way. We say things that we regret. We posture ourselves in positions as judge of all the earth. We condemn our brother or sister. We speak against them. We do terrible things with our words.

Isaiah laments his condition. Then, as he is lamenting his own sinfulness, one of the seraphim flies towards him, in his hand a coal from the altar, and he touches Isaiah. In Isaiah 4:7, he says:

*"Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

The God of the Bible is majestic in holiness and provides forgiveness for sinners.



Then the Lord asks a question in Isaiah 5:8:

*"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"*

Who will go into the world as an ambassador of God's holiness, of His forgiveness for sinners?  
And Isaiah says:

*"Here I am! Send me."*

Then the Lord says:

*"Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

How do human beings have eyes and ears that don't see and don't hear? In Isaiah's day, this language is used to describe the idolatry of his nation. In Isaiah's day, God's people worshipped other gods. They made other gods, and they made other gods with man-made eyes that didn't actually see anything and with man-made ears that didn't actually hear anything. Isaiah's call to preach to an idolatrous people is expressed in this language. One of the great arcing themes of Isaiah is that God would act in such a way that the eyes of the people would be opened and the ears would be opened.

When John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus later in the gospels and says, *"Are you the coming one, or should we look for another?"* Jesus answers in reply by quoting Isaiah 35, saying, *"Tell John what you see and hear."* There's that language. What do you see and hear? The blind have their eyes open. Their ears are open. The deaf can hear. The blind can see. God is at work, opening our eyes, opening our ears, and, Beloved, if we are trapped in idolatry, we cannot hear and see the Word of God, and it remains unfruitful. But we cannot will ourselves into hearing and seeing. That's why we need the power of the Lord in our lives. His power will create in us eyes and ears to see and to hear and to understand, so that His Word can come into us and bear fruit, and idols will be dethroned.

I can imagine Jesus, looking at the disciples at this moment, thinking, *"I've just made this abundantly the clear allusion to Isaiah 6. Are you tracking? Are you with Me?"* I can imagine the disciples, looking at Jesus, trying to hold it together, looking at Him in a way that's pretending like they're tracking, hoping that Jesus won't ask them a direct question. And then He does. In Mark 6:13, He says:

*"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"*

The disciples, as a group, are silent. Did you notice that? Jesus asked them two questions. *"Are*

you getting this?” “How will you understand anything?” And they're all looking at each other, hoping that someone will say something silly, so that everyone can say, “Yeah, that's not it.”

Do you know that Jesus loves us? Jesus loves us so much that He will make things clear. It's like that spouse gaze, when you're trying hard to understand, but you're not getting it, and then it just gets clearer. And that's what Jesus does here. Jesus makes it even clearer. He says, “Okay, let me explain the parable.” Isn't that kind? It's so kind. Jesus says, “Okay, let me explain the parable to you.” In Mark 6:14-15, He says:

*“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.”*

The sower sows the Word, and there are dangerous threats from outside. The seed is sown on the path, where the Word is sown, and when people hear that, Satan, the enemy of our souls, the accuser of the brethren, speaks. *Satan* in Hebrew means “accuser.” *Diavolos*—devil—is the same in Greek. It means “the accuser,” hurling accusations: “You are no good. You can't be anything. You don't deserve to stand in the presence of God. Do you know what you've done?” That's the devil's job: to remind you of your sinfulness, your unworthiness. “You can't serve Jesus Christ. What are you going to do?” The answer, Beloved, to all those accusations is: “I am covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, and He has made me righteous. I am made in His image.” You can say: “He has given me eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart willing to receive His Word, and I'm bursting forth into fruitfulness in the harvest of the nations. What are you going to do about it?” That's what you can say.

In the parable, Satan devours the Word. It's a danger from outside. Jesus says that where the Word is sown on rocky ground, people hear the Word, and they receive it immediately. They are early adopters, fair weather fans, but they have no root. When tribulation or persecution or difficulty arises on account of the Word, they fall away. When things get hard and there is societal opposition in any form, they buckle and crumble. These are two dangers from outside, but I want us to focus on the danger that's inside. Kids, these are the three things I want you to notice. It's a threefold danger that is inside of us. Jesus says in Mark 4:18-19:

*“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 proves unfruitful.”*

They hear the Word—they hear it—but the cares of the this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things choke it.

The first danger is the “**cares of the world.**” The Greek text says “the worries of the age.” It's



when your mind and heart get preoccupied with what this world is worried about. What is this world worried about? What are people concerned about? Where is our attention being garnered as a commodity? The worries of the age, the cares of this world, are the first thing.

The second danger is ***the deceitfulness or allure of wealth***. Riches and wealth are deceitful; they are deceptive. They look to be a certain way. They look permanent. They're not. Even the wealthiest people in the United States have lost, collectively, half a trillion dollars this year so far. Wealth seems permanent, but it's not. Wealth seems to offer peace, but it actually doesn't. Wealth is alluring in that it also seems to be the key element to satisfying our desires.

The third danger is ***the desire or desires for other things***. Anything else than seeking first God's Kingdom, His Word and the proliferation of His Word, and disciples who fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God—anything other than that as a central desire—is a desire for something else.

Jesus says that these three things come into us. That's what's so dangerous. They come inside of us. Satan's activity is outside of us. Societal opposition and persecution are outside of us. But in the parable, as explained, there are these three things that actually can come inside of you and kill you. These can lead you to a place of spiritual starvation: the worries of the age—the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. Some of us desire more than anything else the approval of our friends. That's what we want. "If I just had that, my life would count." Some of us just want the attraction of someone we deem attractive to be reciprocated back to us. We think, "If I just had that...." But all of these things can come in, and they choke the Word. But last, we have the group with the good soil. They hear the Word; they accept it; they bear fruit. It's this explosive fruit—30, 60, a hundredfold—an immense amount of fruit.

We've heard the parable. We focused in on this particular challenge. I want you to feel and be mindful of this particular challenge that is in us, that can come in us, that challenge from which we can be thrown off center by the worry or care of this world, the deceitfulness of wealth or riches, and that desire for other things. "Watch out," Jesus says. "Watch out for those things."

So how do we get those things out of us? That's what I want to ask. How do we get those three dangerous, deadly things out of our hearts? I want to propose one specific solution. The specific solution that I want to propose this morning is to challenge you to become a gospel patron. We use the word "patron" in English. It comes from the Latin *pater*, a father figure. It's incumbent on a father figure in the Greco-Roman world to provide for his larger family system, so the father figure is a giver. A patron is a giver, a supporter.

We had a very profound experience last night. We love classical music. We had a chance to go hear Beethoven's 9th Symphony last night. I'm still charged up. This is one of the great pieces of all time. It's amazing to watch 175 professional musicians work together. It was wonderful to watch this woman hold onto her piccolo for 50 minutes and do nothing except sit there and wait. She waited and waited and waited and waited, and then we all watched as she removed the piccolo from her stand and tucked it under her arm for a couple of minutes to warm it up. At those key lines in the fourth movement, when the whole symphony hall is ready to explode, she had her runs at the end, and her waiting time was worth it. When the fourth movement ended and Symphony Hall burst into applause. it was an explosion. The man who was sitting next to us had a little bit of a classical music faux pas. The fourth movement ended, and he ended, not with clapping, but with "Whoooh!!" He just couldn't hold it. It was special. But, you know, the whole event there was, in part, a reality because of patronage, people who support the arts and the symphony.

The most sublime moment of the concert was the encore. The words of the 9th Symphony had summoned us to praise the Creator, quoting Schiller's poem that surely there is a loving Father who dwells above the canopy of the stars. The Symphony was pointing us up and summoning creation to worship the Creator, but the full identity of the Creator was unknown in the poem. The conductor called for an encore, and the encore was the "Hallelujah Chorus" from "Handel's Messiah." The conductor invited all of Music Hall to join in praising. We could look around Music Hall see some people lifting their hands in worship because King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord God omnipotent, reigneth. The identity of the Creator was known and celebrated. Would that that truth would reverberate in every heart!

Patronage is supporting work, without which the work doesn't happen. I want to challenge all of you this morning to become a patron of the gospel. We use "patron" in this sense of people who support and give and make things happen. We use it because consumerism is an idol in our society. We also use "patron" in a secondary way, as in "I'm a patron of this restaurant. I'm a customer." That's kind of the low level use of "patron," but the large, original sense of "patron" is to be a person that makes things happen, and that's our call—to be a gospel patron. We see in the Gospel of Luke, in Luke 8, there is a group of women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna (the wife of Chuza, who was Herod's household manager) and Susanna. These women of means provided for Jesus and the disciples out of their means. They were gospel patrons. They made the ministry happen.

Paul, in Romans 16 mentions Phoebe, who is a Deaconess of the church in Cenchreae. He entrusts her with the letter of Romans to take it to Rome and deliver it and read it to the church there. He writes in the end:

*“Welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.”*

She has supported the work of the ministry. Without her help, the ministry doesn't happen.

Brothers and Sisters, we are called this morning to be patrons of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gospel patrons fill church history. William Tyndale was the first one to translate the Bible into English, and he benefited from the patronage of a Christian businessman named Humphrey Monmouth. Most people don't know Humphrey Monmouth at all, and yet Tyndale's work of translation would be impossible without it.

Most of us in the United States know or heard of George Whitfield, who preached to 80% of the American colonists, traveling all around this country. God gave him a voice that could be heard by 10,000 people without amplification. That's a serious voice, isn't it? His voice was so powerful that Benjamin Franklin came to the Boston Commons and stood at the back, just to see if he could hear him. He said, “It's amazing; I can hear him.” He preached Christ. Whitfield preached over 10,000 sermons. His ministry was supported by a woman named Lady Huntington. Most people don't know her name, but she was a gospel patron.

John Thornton was a gospel patron to John Newton. We had a biographical message on John Newton in the fall. It was the Christian businessman John Thornton who heard John Newton's testimony and said that other people need to hear this. He encouraged Newton and paid for his testimony to be published in Britain.

Theophilus in the New Testament is a gospel patron. He pays for Luke's Gospel to be produced and disseminated. All of us this morning are called to be gospel patrons. It's this act of supporting the gospel ministry with our resources that has what Thomas Chalmers called the explosive power of a new affection. It's gospel patronage that drives out these three things that choke the Word in us. It's gospel patronage that drives out the worries of this world, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things. Gospel patronage is to say, “I am about making the gospel heard and known,” and we support that as patrons in all kinds of ways. We support that with our financial gifts. We support that by sending missionaries to unreached parts of the world. We support that by translating the Bible into languages where it's not yet translated. We support that by being about the dissemination of God's Word in our community.

When you give someone a Bible or you share the Word of Christ or you just do a broadcast spread of gospel seed for disciple-making, I want you to see yourself in that moment as a wealthy son or daughter of the King, who is functioning as a gospel patron. I don't want you to

see yourself as a consumer. It's such a small view of the human person. I want you to see yourself as a benefactor. I want you to see yourselves, whatever your income level, as being sons and daughters by adoption of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our names together are written on the deed of the New Heavens and a New Earth. Did you know that? You're going to be inheriting this whole thing with Christ, so start acting like it. Really, start acting like it, and see yourself, when you act with patronage, as someone who makes things happen for other people, a person who makes the gospel spread happen. When we do that as a community, when 10% of us, 20% of us, when 50% of us at Kenwood start doing that, we will start to ask the question: "What are we going to do with all this grain?" Don't you want to have conversations as a church: "What are we going to do with all this grain? Who needs it?" Some of you will bake it. Some of you will eat it raw by the handful. Some of us will ship it overseas where there is a shortage of grain. I want us to be a community of gospel patrons. Gospel patrons are not just from church history. They are from today.

I want to introduce you to a man named Akeel Sachak. He grew up in a Muslim family. He became a Christian as he was preparing to take the bar exam and become a lawyer. He became a Christian because one of his friends challenged him whether or not believing in God actually required more faith than not believing in God. His friend challenged him that his atheism required a lot of faith, and that challenge led him on a journey to receiving Christ. Akeel not only received Christ, he passed the bar and became an investment banker. He was taught early in his discipleship what we're trying to teach in the month of May, that our giving is a great indicator of our discipleship. Akeel says, "God has been generous to me in sending His Son Jesus Christ to take my sin on Himself and enable me to be reconciled to God."

There is no generosity to which any of us can aspire that can match God's generosity. All our generosity is as stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to us. Akeel says, "I think it's essential that we see whatever resources we have as resources we have been entrusted with to fulfill God's purposes in this world and not ours to do with as we please." What we have is entrusted to us to steward over, to be gospel patrons, benefactors of the Kingdom.

I've been super blessed this week by this book. It's called *Gospel Patrons*, and it's a story of three gospel patrons in church history and some application for today. It's a powerful story. Beloved, we're called to be gospel patrons, and this act of patronage is a way of being a lover of discipleship. It's a way of saying, "What I care about the most in the world is that the Word of God is being disseminated so other people can see it, hear it, receive it, and their lives can burst forth in fruitfulness. I want us all to see ourselves and live as gospel patrons. It's a high calling.

It's special to see the list of benefactors for ArtsWave for the art community, and I'm deeply

grateful for those people. I'm always moved by the roster of names. I'm moved by how some names have an amount or brackets of amounts. Many of us tend to look at those lists and look at those top few names. I am often drawn to the very large list of names that are in smaller amounts. Whatever God has entrusted to you, I want us to be a church that's committed to gospel patronage. Gospel patronage protects us from that danger outside and that deceptive danger inside.

I asked you a month ago to do a 30-day check, and I want to follow up on that. I asked you to document everything you spend for 30 days and talk about it as a couple, or if you're single, just review it. You could review it with a friend, or if you're in a discipling relationship, you can review it with your disciple-maker. "Help me interpret the receipts of my life. What do you see?" When we practice gospel patronage, I would love for the receipts of our lives and our spending to reflect that we love the Word of God. I want to see it disseminated, and I want to see people receive that and grow.

How do you become a gospel patron right now this morning? You can do it by starting with an offering of thanksgiving. It can be of any size. Just as beginning your day with devotional prayer is a sign that your heart is for the Lord, a one-time gift of thanksgiving to God is a signal to God: "I am a gospel patron. I am for this." You can do that today. You can make regular giving a lifestyle habit. We love to do that in our family. We have a regular giving that we do automatically to Kenwood monthly. We would love to talk to you about how you can get set up to do that. It really is a wonderful thing. When we have income that we were not expecting, we love to talk together about where the Lord is calling us to give this gift.

Finally, you can make gospel patronage part of your legacy, and that is to intentionally plan your earthly estate. Every one of us has a will, whether you know it or not. Someone told me that if we die without a will, the state has a will, already, that will be carried out, and that will may not align with your desires. So he wisely said, "You may want to think about that, because after you're dead, you can't." So where do you want your earthly estate to go? We had meaningful conversation about that and resolved that we wanted our earthly resources to go to the dissemination of the Word of God in the world. I want to challenge you to be intentional about that. That's an important part of gospel patronage, now, as a lifestyle, and as a legacy.

We're going to close in worship. We've come to worship the Lord. We've come to hear from His Word. I told you it was a dangerous parable, but it's actually a parable that invites us into life. It's a parable that invites us to have the idols of our hearts removed and to have them removed so that the soil in us is fertile, that the weeds are removed, spiritual dangers held at bay outside, and the Word of God comes in, and it is fruitful and abundant. May God enable us in

the days and weeks ahead to have conversations around here: “What we are going to do with all this grain?” Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, we love You and praise You, and we ask You to be with us today. We pray, Lord, that You would uproot what is idolatrous in us and is making it hard for us to see and hear and understand Your Word. May Your Word come into us now. May we receive it, and may it be fruitful in us. Lord, may You enable us to step forward, all of us, to honor You and serve You and to be patrons of the gospel in our giving. Lord, we ask that You would forgive us where we’ve gotten distracted or trapped by the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things. We desire You, Lord Jesus, and we sing of Your goodness now together.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.