

Growth

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now can you turn back with me this morning to Mark's Gospel chapter 4. This is the last of four in our morning worship on our vision and strategy as a church. The glory of God, the gospel of God, the grace of God and now the growth that comes from God. I guess we could look at it that way and what I'm hoping is that we can kind of memorize these things just to help us remind us of you why we exist and the reason that we're doing what we do. And these things that we've looked at are principles for the Christian church. It's not formula so we're not saying you know if you tick these boxes and you do these things then hey presto you'll have a great church and things will be fantastic. We're not saying that at all. It's not a kind of formulaic way of looking at our Christian lives. It's simply some kind of basic principles that remind us of and I hope it will focus and challenge us and turn us towards the Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense they're kind of family traits. That's what we're looking at them as.

Their family traits are belonging to the kingdom of God, the family of God and I hope that as we embed them in our thinking, hey you go along to St. Columbus what do they do there? You think of glory, gospel, grace and growth and that will sometimes help us in our own Christian lives and in our communities to think about who we are and it will hopefully always encourages and point us towards the Lord Jesus Christ and different aspects of that as a family and we see that as a congregation that that's what we're trying to be a family of God's people together. Now because of that we're going to fail and we're going to struggle and we're going to fall and we're going to make mistakes and we're going to act with ungrace okay. It's a made-up word for the day. Ungrace we're going to act in a way that's not particularly graceful sometimes but the important thing is that as we do and as we serve and as we follow and as we work that we will put into practice the principles of the glory of God and the growth of the gospel and the gospel itself and grace as we work together and fix our eyes on Jesus. So just want to highlight one or two points from the parable. It's very well known. I'm not going to go into detail about the parable.

I imagine everyone see here maybe not everyone if you're here for church for the first time maybe you've never read the parable of the sower but if you haven't then I would encourage you to read a little bit more about it and talk to me afterwards but many people here will know the parable of the sower and but it's in three of the gospels it's a very well known parable so I'm not going to go into the parable in details. I'm going to pick out one or two things from the parable and then I'm going to try and explain why growth and fruitfulness is important for us as a kind of basic principle for our church and for the life of our church and the structures of our church. So if you look at God's parables or Jesus parables they nearly always just have about one major theme there's one major thing in each of them it's not a multiplicity of lessons so there's one really important lesson probably in most of the parables and maybe some sub lessons we can take also from them and I guess the key theme if you were to write down what the key theme of the parable of the sower would be I wonder what you would write. Fruitfulness probably is the main point of the parable of the sower is it's about bearing fruit as a Christian it's about growing as a

Christian that's probably the main point of the parable but there's sub points within the parable of the sower like and there's a lot of unseen hard work goes on behind the scenes before there's growth there's a lot of plowing that goes on there's a lot of weeding that goes on there's a lot of removing of stones that goes on before there's seeds so and so there's this kind of maybe sub point of unseen hard work there's maybe also a sub point of the unsifted or unsifted seed that the seeds nothing very dramatic it's nothing very attractive you know when you see seed in your hands it's pretty dull and ordinary and looks a bit dead and light and yet from this kind of rather inauspicious and beginnings it bears wonderful and beautiful and useful and nourishing fruit so you've got the kind of that part of the parable as well and the beauty of what is produced the fruitfulness the loveliness the sweetness the nourishment that is produced so there I think fruitfulness is if you're looking at a main kind of spine that runs through the parable it will be fruitfulness and other things kind of come from that so if we take that parable which is a story about planting and sowing seed and about where that seed goes and what happens to that seed and the main reason for that seed being planted if we take that and apply it to the Christian life which is what Jesus does you see Jesus tells a story and then the disciples ask what it means and he then explains to them what it means and he says the seed is the word and the different kind of soils or the different kind of people and the responsiveness to the gospel and some of them get choked up and some of them the word gets snatched away and then for most of the seed the seed falls on good soil and it bears fruit so that's the kind of picture so it's about spiritual fruitfulness and growing what then would be some of the lessons we learn from that parable just very briefly and by way of kind of starting and introductions to this sermon well it's important isn't it in terms of if we're going to grow as Christians if we're going to develop our Christian lives then there's a lot of heart preparation to be done because the seed in the parable is blessed and is fruitful in a plowed field in a field that has been worked in a field that is receptive to receiving the seed that's been the stones and the weeds and all that stuff has been taken from it so there's it's good for the seed it's up the seed can grow in this prepared field and so the application is our hearts as Christians if we are to be blessed and to be fruitful and to be growing Christians then there's heart preparation to be done that we need to be relying on God and aware of the spiritual work having become Christians by his grace having been offered salvation through Christ and received this a wonderful gift of grace and salvation in order to grow and be fruitful we need to be aware of our own hearts and where of the some of the things that that stop us growing and stop us being fruitful as Christians and the parable speaks about them doesn't it there's the world and all its attractions and you know verse 15 some of the people on verse 16 so in a rocky place of the here the word that you enjoy but since it has no roots last this trouble persecution comes because of the word they fall away or other seeds so in among thorns they hear the word the worries of life to seekfulness of wealth desire for other things coming and choke it or on the hard ground Satan comes and takes away so there's three there's different kind of enemies as it were that come and take away the

fruitfulness and the usefulness of the word and we need to be aware that that's a heart problem for us that sometimes we're in a spiritual battle so when we're in church or when we're opening the word or when we're speaking to God or when we're in prayer with God there's a spiritual battle going on that Satan wants to take away any kind of interest we have in the gospel and he'll snatch away the word quickly if our hearts aren't prepared for that and then we know our own hearts are attracted with sinful desires who's choke his word and we know the world outside there's lots of things that attract us and also will oppose us and mock us and laugh at us as persecutors for being Christians and all of these things stop us from being fruitful Christians stop us from growing as Christians so that we recognize heart preparation is important we recognize that growth takes hard work and patience you know the farmer doesn't just come out and sow the seed there's a great deal of unseen hard labor in order for his seed to bear fruit and to produce grain and the same is true both spiritually for our own lives as

[8 : 52] Christians to grow but also as a church to grow or for us to see conversions and other people coming to faith evangelism in other words what Adam's involved in in the see you and what we're all involved in in our lives evangelism and our personal faith involves hard effort and hard work it involves getting to know people and breaking down the barriers that stop them from listening to the gospel it means getting their trust and their love and into their hearts it involves just time and energy and prayer and effort it involves our hearts and our souls if we are to see fruitfulness and growth so we learn that it takes heart preparation and hard work to grow as Christians and to grow as a church and to see conversions we also reckon I think and see from the parable that much of the growth of the gospel and the work of the kingdom is counterintuitive it's what I said at the beginning it doesn't look like much the seed doesn't look like much doesn't look like it's going to be very productive it's dry and it's kind of lifeless and it doesn't seem that great deal of blessing or fruitfulness or apples or oranges or bananas or anything nice and healthy is going to come from this seed I don't know much about these things but they all start a seed somewhere so it's counterintuitive you know the sowing of the seed seems repetitive you ever seen in these in the farms in Scotland maybe you're driving up the A9 or in Perthshire and in Fife and you see these massive big fields and you see it's not like biblical times obviously but it's modern application of that you see all these massive massive big tractors and they're blowing up and down and the guy's got to go in a straight line and he's got to turn and come back and turn and go up and turn and go down it's kind of repetitive and dull there's nothing very exciting about it you know he doesn't stop every so often and get on top of the tractor and dance and hope that that'll make things better and or doesn't go in circles and create beautiful pictures he just goes up and down and that happens all day it's kind of repetitive as it would have been in Jesus time just taking the bag throwing out the seed not seeing anything happen as a result and it's counterintuitive yet there's this fantastic and immeasurable return from doing that so that months later you see tremendous fruit and tremendous growth and tremendous nourishment coming from what has been done the spiritual disciplines of the

Christian life don't seem that attractive being obedient reading the word praying being obedient reading the word praying nothing very dramatic nothing new nothing that seems to be producing anything well I've prayed I've read the word I'm trying to obey Christ but nothing seems to be happening doesn't seem to be a great deal of fruit nothing miraculous why can't it be more exciting why can't it be more stunning because very often the fruitfulness comes from the preparation and the hard work of the spiritual disciplines of loving God if you love me you will obey my commands and serving him and following him the cross in itself is counterintuitive the world looks on and says you're a bunch of nutters because you're following this guy who died in a cross Jesus is weak and meaningless and powerful powerless the church is a waste of time and why are you involved in these things and yet it is as we focus on

Jesus Christ and on the gospel of grace and in the simplicity of salvation we will find a transformation maybe today you feel your life is a little bit like you're just plowing all the time so I'm seeing nothing much exciting happening can I tell you it's counterintuitive you will be blessed and God will honor that the last thing I want to say in terms of the parable is that directly in terms of parable is that fruitfulness I think is normal you know maybe we spent a lot of time looking at parable like this and all the paths and the hard ground and other weeds and the choking and all of that but if you look at any field if you look at any illustration that Jesus would have been using the vast amount of the field would have been plowed yes it would have been passed where the ground was hard yes there would have been edges for the where it was choked and where there was weeds but generally speaking the fruitfulness is normal and that's what Jesus is speaking about here he's saying that growth in grace the beauty of Christ the fruitfulness of the gospel is normal for Christians to experience and to enjoy and to be Christ like to be attractive spiritually to be nourishing for other people to be multiplying the seed of the word as it goes from your life and the fruitfulness of your life and is multiplied into other people's lives maturing seeing other people coming to faith I think that's all normal for the Christian growth in grace maturity and growth in the church I think that's normal for the church today I think that is where we should be and that's what we should be looking for it's not extraordinary I'm not talking about revival I'm just talking about ordinary growth that is fruitful and is

God glorifying what then as we move on what then is the role of this church in terms of this principle of growing as Christians and growing as a people of God and why is it important to us well can I say that we are striving to provide the right environment as a church for growth if you're visiting with us today I'm sorry that I'm being so specific but I hope that what I'm saying here probably will apply to every church and should apply because it comes under the teaching of God's word is really we want to provide the right and got environment for growth and in other words again that we are a people who is as a people expect development and expect growth in our Christian lives and in the number of people that we have we're expecting to become a holy or people holy or sorry holy or people not holy or people I just added the R because it left out that we're moving on to maturity that that's what we're trying to do and that's what we are aiming to be that we are people who enjoy should enjoy the energy of change and not to be content with stagnancy now I know things sometimes it depends what we equate with stagnancy and growth and things but spiritually speaking we're not content with being a church where we are happy to be stagnant in our Christian lives so that we we're never self-examining we're never thinking about our growth we're never thinking about whether developing these are challenges you will find and the environment is here I'll come back to that a little bit but as a leadership and as us as a movement of people together and we are seeking to help to equip Christians to grow that's you know one of the major principles of the church that we focus on what will help us to grow as Christians in other words by our teaching and by example so that the teaching of God's word and the foundation of God's word which is the seed is hugely important in this church so you'll not find at any point however many people give a pressure and democratically want us to change will not change that we will keep the centrality of the word in our preaching and our teaching and our worship in our city groups and our mentoring and all that we do we will keep this place in the middle because it's important the preaching of the word and the teaching of the word is central to what we do we recognize that that reflects Christ and that reflects the whole point of the church if you look up with me I've got a couple of verses just to look up in

Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 15 Paul says instead speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up grow up into him who is the head that is Christ so we'll focus on the word which focuses on Jesus and we will we'll seek to grow up into him and then in 1st Timothy chapter 3 and verse 15 it's a challenge to you to look up all these as quick as I do 1st Timothy 3 verse 15 we have the words if I'm delayed you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household which is the church of the living God the pillar and foundation of the truth so the church is equated with being foundational being a pillar of the gospel and we will always seek to be a church that meets around God's word and that focuses on the importance of God's word and part of that then will be how you come for example to church on a Sunday morning in terms of your heart because you have to do as much work as well maybe yeah you do as much work as I have to do in preparing a sermon I have to prepare a sermon spiritually prayerfully and with time you have to prepare you prepare your hearts as well as a contract that we're entered into here you can just fall out your bed and come along a church and expect to grow and be blessed because our heart needs to be prepared to receive the seed to receive the word so you have to work just as a now you may think this church is very passive and there's only one bloke up the front rabbiting on all the time but it's not that spiritually you're all active you're all being prepared you're all come ready to receive what God is to say through his word so although you're sitting in seats looking passive you're just a bundle of energy there spiritually just feeding on the word and soaking up because you've prepared your hearts and you've prayed over it and you saw Lord teach me today speak to me challenge my heart change me because I need to do that you need to do that as well as the centrality of the word is so important and within that as a church we will seek to expose the battle expose the battle that we all face in growing and I mentioned that earlier isn't it we've got Satan we've got with the world the flesh the devil as it were you've got all these things that will stunt your spiritual growth and we'll speak about them and we'll teach about them because the Bible does we'll say that you come to church but it's not like coming to a bowling club it's coming to a spiritual organization where there's a spiritual enemy of your soul a Satan who wants to snatch that word away and who wants to keep you from being fruitful so this is although it looks like a very ordinary plain bunch of people we are people who are focus of spiritual opposition and spiritual blessing so there's this we'll expose these things about the need for prayer prayer over the word prayer in our relationships prayer and how we deal with one another because Satan will get what does he normally do it's normally an inter-church relationships that he works it's usually people falling out with one another that's how he's effective in stopping us growing as we gossip about one another or are self-righteous about one another or walk away from one another that is how he's effective in splitting us from growing and being blessed so there's the world as well outside and there's the world in our hearts that the word will expose and that we will seek to expose and be accountable to one another and help and encourage and build up one another around that but also in providing or helping equip us surely what we seek to do most is is highlight the beauty of Christ highlight the beauty of Christ that is the warmth of the gospel of healing and of salvation and of growth we will speak

[21 : 27] of the miracle of the new birth you know because that seed isn't it it goes into the ground you think it dies you ever put anything in the we go into the ground and we die seed goes into the ground and it's through its death that it grows and is fruitful now there's all kinds of spiritual analogies there that I'm not going to go into but we'll see the transformation of growth and of the gospel we will see the transformation of Christ remember last week when we were speaking what were we speaking about last week we were speaking not about glory and not about the gospel but grace we were talking about the rays the Sun rays of grace remember that if you were here well it's the same kind of picture that we'll see the rays of God's grace Christ grace enabling us to grow enabling us to be blessed by because it's through him and by him and it's a miracle that we grow at all it's about being transformed and his Holy Spirit will resource us to grow this is not a self-help sermon this is not a do-it-yourself way to grow this is about depending on Jesus and relying on him for growth just as the miracle of the seed that grows to produce so it's Christ who produces in us so the church therefore at that level it's not consumerist we're not to be here to meet every perceived spiritual or social need you might have we're not here to be an ecclesiastical gold standard that you can measure your your desire for what kind of church you want to be part of and they'll either accept or reject it because that's not what we are what we are is a family that's what we are we're a family that are sinners who are saved by grace and we're seeking to grow together and we need one another to do that that's what we are if you want to be part of that stay if you don't want to be part of that then you probably not stay too long anyway but we're a family who have sinners saved by grace sometimes to be part of St. Columbus is to be like part of a stony weedy field we're not that plowed sometimes it does seem like it's a real plowing match because we're sinners that's what we are isn't it we're sinners but we believe saved by grace but remember when to if you've come along today and you're a bit fed up and you feel that the whole Christian life and your involvement in the Christian life and in St. Columbus is about like plowing a stony weedy field can I say God isn't finished with us yet and you are part of that and I am part of that and we're part of that together sometimes we will bear fruit more than other times and sometimes for us it's a real struggle but

I want to read one more verse which I read in going through my own Bible readings yesterday and I thought was great Jeremiah 17 verses 7 and 8 blessed is the man or the person who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him he will be like a tree similar to the Samui Sun he'll be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream it does not fear when heat comes its leaves are always green and listen to this it has no worries in the year of drought and never fails to bear fruit so even in the times of spiritual drought even in the dark times even at times you're plowing through the Christian life he says you will still bear fruit and that's the miracle of grace and that's the miracle of God is that it's not in our own strength it's not just a formula it's not ticking some boxes it's depending on the Lord Jesus Christ so that when you feel dark when you feel bleak when it feels difficult and you're still looking and trusting and confident and relying on the Lord you will be bearing fruit even though it's a drought that's brilliant and it's encouraging and it's I hope it will enthuse us to put our roots deeper into Christ so the church's job is to provide the right environment it is to help equip Christians

I'm running out of time we've got one or two things I want to say from the passage the church also is challenging the status quo I mentioned that before is that we're not about staying the same so it's no badge of honour to say I haven't changed in 35 years as a Christian it depends what you mean by that but it's not about stagnancy it's about health and about fruitfulness to be unfruitful as a Christian to bear bad fruit sinful fruit is ungodly and we are here as a people together to challenge one another along that lines we need in other words you need other people's perspective don't you to sometimes challenge you it's very very difficult just to challenge yourself because I'm going on okay things are fine and well one or two things I need to deal with but maybe some other time you need other people God has ordained it to be that we are a family once you are not a people now you are a people because we need people to challenge us we need the preaching to challenge us we need people to say to us that when we're suffering that we can still bear fruit we need to be challenged about bearing the fruit of the spirit love joy peace patience goodness gentleness meekness self-control and they don't happen in a vacuum they happen when we interact or otherwise with one another and evangelism that we are challenging one another as individuals to say well how are you growing how are you sharing your faith who have you spoken to about the gospel and as a community as a church people that we challenge the status quo and you know that can be very difficult because gearing for growth as a church is quite a difficult thing actually because we don't like change when there's growth there's always change but we don't like change as people generally speaking we like the status quo we like stability and that will be even reflected a little bit I don't mind this this is not a problem I'm just using as an illustration we generally tend to sit in the same place every week because we don't like change that much we like to do and be in the same places that's absolutely fine because we have routines but spiritually we need to challenge stagnancy and we need to recognize when we're growing that there will be change but what we need to do is recognize that there's unchanging foundations sometimes we've mixed that up so people have said oh you can never change anything in the church because then you're changing the gospel but the gospel is unchanging we're not saying that we're saying the foundations will always be the same the gospel remains the same the word the need for Christ salvation the Holy Spirit all these things remain absolutely unchanged but as we grow our perspectives and our practical outworking of that will change growth brings change and as a leadership one of our responsibilities is to manage that change so that people don't feel too unstable and don't think that the ground is coming away from under them and the only way we can do that is by repeatedly repeatedly saying the gospel isn't changing the foundation isn't changing Jesus isn't changing the spirit isn't changing we're keeping the foundations the same but how we flexibly outwork that and manage that is something that we allow change to reveal itself and as we mature because you know if in any family if you all remained in that piece it would be a strange thing we grow out of these things we learn to use a fork and knife we aren't to use the toilet we learn to go to school we grow up we become independent and we change and the same is true spiritually so the last thing is

very briefly that we become geared broadening that is we are seeking to be geared for growth as a church as a congregation and we do that by recognizing and this requires all your patience in time it requires recognizing that there are different stages there are some very young Christians here who need just very simple Bible teaching there are others who are very mature in the faith and have different needs there are young young people who do need a kind of intense involvement at some levels in their lives there's others who are older are kind of basking in their faith and in what they are able to share some need milk not solid food and so there's a whole mixture of kind of ages and stages in the congregation please be patient with that please recognize that please share with one another and see the different needs of the different stages that what will happen if we are church that's geared for growth but also as we're geared for growth we need to be maturing as a people so we're looking for and I'm looking for and you should be looking for and the leadership are looking for people to become more fruitful to be maturing in their faith to be showing more patience to be more prayerful as time goes on to be empathetic to the needs and the idiosyncrasies of others to be more willing to be accountable to other

Christians to be hungrier for the word to be better at bearing one another's burdens to be less selfish to be more compassionate to be aware more clearly of the enemy of our heart and soul and our own hearts maturing as a people that's what we're looking for we're not looking to remain the same and as we're gearing for growth we're looking also for more conversion growth not just personal growth not individual growth but we're looking for people to be saved to come to know Jesus Christ and we don't see much of that maybe we're plowing a lot just now we're not seeing much fruitfulness in terms of conversions and we need to think out do we need to change things as a church do we need to change our emphasis do we need more training on evangelism do we need to be more burdened as individuals do we need to see that it's not me that will convert people it's God who will do it but he'll do it through the you through your contacts and your relationships as you share the word as you live your life as you bear fruit for him are we doing enough to give and provide opportunities for conversions are we praying enough for that as a church and lastly and very briefly within this structure within this last point about and gear gearing for growth as a church our biggest structures for one of a better term will be that we'll always be geared for growth so that we're going to grow we hope by God's grace to a certain size here then we plant another church we planted church in the cornerstone we hope the Tom will plant a church in Midlothian and we hope as we keep growing we will keep propagating you know you know how it is with plants you can take a plant that's good and solid and you can kind of have it and you can replant part of it and then it's healthier and it grows and it's got room for growth that's what we want to do we want to make room for growth here as people leave so 30 or so people left for corners so there was room in the church more people came in and so the church have multiplied and we're geared for growth that way as a church so that we will multiply again and we'll lose some lose some more people know we'll give some more people to our work there and then hopefully the church will grow and then we'll see another opportunity that God will provide and we'll plant another church in the city and then we'll plant another church in the city and God will keep on multiplying and growing the work and that's what we're setting out to do and each of these places we hope will take the same DNA with them about the gospel about the glory of God about grace and about growth and it'll multiply that within the city this city desperately needs Christ and we can't do it from the center we can't do it from the royal mile we need to be out among the people living in among them worshipping among them a community among them and we believe the New Testament model for that is planting more churches and we want you to be part of that and we want you to pray for that and we want God to provide the resources for that and we want a God to bless that and we pray that we'll be led by God we'd be fine-tuned by God we'd be radically overturned by God if we're going the wrong way and that he will teach us about growth may it be that we are not stagnant maybe that you're not depending on something that happened 20 years ago in your life a conversion to Christ and there's been no change since then may it be that you're radically bearing fruit growing and your heart is well-prepared as you serve him and as you use spiritual disciplines he gives to make your heart ready for growth let's pray briefly together Father God we thank you for the gospel we thank you for what we're striving to do which you have taught us and led us and which often we've been slow to learn and to understand as a leadership and as a people we thank you

[35 : 00] that you're patient with us that you're kind that you're gentle you're forgiving and that you're gracious we also know that you're a God who loves us to follow you and serve you a God who loves obedience and a God who provides us with the Holy Spirit God who hates sin and stagnancy and fruitlessness because it is not what you have planned and purposed for us and if we are failing then we are listening to our sinful hearts and we are being choked by the world in which we live and we are being blinded by the evil one and whose kingdom we are so bless as we pray and help us to sing your praises as we conclude our worship for we ask in Jesus name amen