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Tillamook, Oregon

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The Parable of the Sower

March 26th, 2023

Sermon Text: Luke 8:1-15

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 2

Luk 8:1-15 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, (2) and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, (3) and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

(4) And when a great crowd was

gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable,

(5) “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.

(6) And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

(7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.

(8) And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

(9) And when his disciples asked

him what this parable meant, (10) he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’

(11) Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

(12) The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

(13) And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

(14) And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

(15) As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the

word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

This is our old friend, J.C. Ryle:

The parable of the sower which is contained in these verses is reported more frequently than any parable in the Bible. It is a parable of universal application. The things it relates are continually going on in every congregation to which the gospel is preached. The four kinds of hearts it describes are to be found in every assembly which hears the Word. These circumstances should make us always read the parable with a deep sense of its importance. We should say to ourselves as we read it, “This concerns me! My heart is to be seen in this parable. I too am here!” The passage itself requires little explanation. In fact, the meaning of the whole picture is so fully explained by our Lord that no exposition of man can throw much additional light on it. The parable is preeminently a parable of caution – and caution about a most important subject – the way of hearing the

Word of God. It was meant to be a warning to the apostles not to expect too much from hearers. It was meant to be a warning to all ministers of the gospel not to look for too great results from their sermons. It was meant, not least, to be a warning to hearers to take heed how they hear. Preaching is an ordinance of which the value can never be overrated in the church of Christ. But it should never be forgotten that there must not only be good preaching but also good hearing.

Ryle, J. C.. Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke: A Commentary (Updated Edition) (p. 157). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

These are the very words of our Lord Jesus Christ and we must receive them as such.

Carelessness in matters of this temporal world is often dangerous and even disastrous. Think of a careless electrician, or architect, auto mechanic, firearms handler, truck driver...we could go on and

on. Care-less-ness is dangerous even in temporal things.

But carelessness in regard to our soul is vastly more dangerous because the results have eternal consequences. People who attend to this world's matters with great care can typically be seen to demonstrate that they have no care when it comes to their standing with God, to the destination they are headed toward at the end of their earthly life. They could care less about these matters.

Our Lord's parable addresses several examples of this kind of spiritual carelessness – of an uncaring attitude toward the things of God and of the soul. Let's take care now and consider His words carefully-

The Word of God is a Seed

Hopefully one day soon Spring is actually going to arrive and people will go out and cultivate soil and plant seeds. Jesus pictured the Word of God preached as *a seed*. He intends that we should consider this image carefully. It tells us

something about the Word of God when it comes to us. You have the same image given by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians:

1Co 3:4-9 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? (5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. (6) **I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.** (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (8) He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. (9) For we are God's fellow workers. **You are God's field,** God's building.

See it? WE are the soil. God's field. And into that soil the Lord sends His Word by means of *preaching*. Think of it. Think through from Genesis to Revelation – how does the Lord bring His Word to us so that we might be saved and sanctified? He has always done it by *preaching*. The OT prophets.

John the Baptist. Jesus the Son of God Himself. The Apostles.

Eph 4:11-13 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

This is why it is soooo vital for us to give ourselves to the preaching of His Word. That Word is *a seed*. Preaching plants it, preaching waters it, and then God Himself gives it life and growth and fruit. Preaching then is what we call one of God's *means of grace* by which the Lord sends His saving and sanctifying grace to us. This is what happens also when you read your Bible. What are you reading? *Preaching. The Word of God preached by the Prophets, by the Living Word Himself – Jesus – and by His Apostles.*

Now, this Word which comes to us in preaching *is likened to a seed* in this parable. *The seed is the Word of God*. Let's think about seeds for a few moments and understand why the Lord selected this picture.

A seed, of course, is a remarkable thing. One seed contains more than enough plain and clear evidence that God exists and that He is the Creator of everything. A seed is a self-contained package of life – just as God's Word is spiritual life – it is living and powerful. But....

That seed, when sown upon us, must be nurtured. It must be guarded, it must have good soil, it must be watered, and protected.

Or else...

What? It will either never germinate at all or if it does begin to grow it will die. *Seeds have many enemies:*

- Weeds
- Insects
- Rodents
- Frost

- Drought
- Various blights and fungi
- Birds

And so, the gardener must be diligent. The soil must be cultivated, fertilized, cleared of weeds. Slug bait and other defenses against these enemies of the seed must be used. This is the reason for the *scarecrow*. To scare the crows!

Now, Jesus said that *the Word of God is a seed. It is like a seed*. It contains life from the Lord, but it has myriads of enemies. So many enemies in fact that only a portion of that seed ever brings forth fruit. In most cases the seed dies where it landed. Why? Because the soil was bad.

The Soil is Man's Heart

Now, the Sower is Jesus Himself, and subsequently those to whom He called to sow (and really every Christian sharing the gospel with others). This seed of His Word, He says, lands on soil of differing characters.

- Falls along a path, trampled, gobbled up by birds
- Rocky ground, springs up quickly but withers away due to no moisture
- Falls among the thorns, grows up with them, and is choked by them
- Good soil, seed grows and bears fruit

Matthew of course gives his account of this same parable and describes the soils:

Mat 13:3-8 And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. (4) And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

(5) Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, (6) but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

(7) Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked

them.

(8) Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Thus we see that Jesus’ intent is to show us what to expect when His Word is preached – *but also to warn us of what carelessness in regard to the seed planted in us will result in!*

The Meaning of the Soils

Hear then Jesus’ explanation of the parable:

Luk 8:9-15 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, (10) he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’

(11) Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

(12) The ones along the path are

those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

(13) And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

(14) And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

(15) As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Before we look further at the unproductive soils, consider very carefully that 15th verse which describes the person represented by the good soil.

- Hold the Word fast

- In honesty and goodness
- Bear fruit with patience

Here is soil prepared by the Lord – He is the only one to receive glory for it, not us. This parable has the sovereign election of God running right through it. *It has been given for you to know the secrets of the kingdom of God*, Jesus told His disciples. But for the rest, for those to whom the Lord has not given to understand, the Word is not going to be understood. In fact, this is the purpose of His parables – to *hide His Word from them*. A mystery, and yet it is not because of man who runs, but of God who has mercy.

These *hold fast the Word*. In honesty – truly desiring to know and believe His Word. Holding what they have heard fast so that no enemy can come and take it away.

We will consider this further in a few moments, but let's first look at the bad soils:

- Those who are like that trodden down, hard path so

that the devil comes immediately and snatches away the seed sown. These are hard-hearted, who do not receive His Word, and it is taken away by the devil.

- Those who receive the Word with joy and exuberance. Everyone including themselves, believe that surely the Word has taken root and they are saved. But...they are not rooted. Their "faith" is not true faith given by God. It is superficial and the first time some test comes, something that is going to cost them – they are done. Most of us have known people just like that.
- Then there are those who remain among the thorns. So that though there is initial germination and a bit of apparent growth, eventually the world and the flesh choke them out. *Cares and riches and pleasures of life*. They are *care-less* in respect to the Word given them, and their care is focused upon riches and pleasures in this perishing

world. And they are done as well.

Let's ask ourselves some questions by way of self-examination:

- Has the Word of God EVER truly gotten through to you? Could it be that the reason it has never taken root and grown is that your heart is so hard, so unreceptive to God's Word, that every time you hear it the devil immediately snatches it away?

Heb 3:13-15 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Could it be that you so keep yourself hardened against God's Word that it has NEVER in your life done more than land on you

and it lays right on top of that hard, sun-baked soil, readily plucked up by Satan in a moment?

- Could it be that each time the Word of God has come to you, you fail the inevitable test which follows?

Heb 3:7-8 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,

People spring up quickly many times – just like this man:

Mat 8:19 And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

Really? Jesus immediately tested that man’s “faith” and he failed the test.

You know, you can sit in a church Sunday after Sunday and keep right on time after time, failing the testing the Lord sends your way. The Pharisees were perfect examples of this evil. Jesus

exposed them. He tested them and they flunked even though they went right on in their pious religion.

- And then, how are we doing in regard to the cares and riches and pleasures of this life which choke out the Word of God?

I know what this is like. You can be sitting in this church on any given Lord’s Day, hearing the Word of God, having it sown upon you, and immediately choking that Word out because your mind and your priorities are on the issues of your present life.

Here is Ryle once more:

The first caution that we learn from the parable of the sower is to beware of the devil when we hear the Word. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of some hearers are like the road. The seed of the gospel is plucked away from them by the devil almost as soon as it is sown. It does not sink down into their consciences. It does not make the

least impression on their minds. That malicious devil is unwearied in his efforts to do us harm. He is ever watching for our halting and seeking occasion to destroy our souls. But nowhere, perhaps, is the devil so active as in a congregation of gospel hearers! Nowhere does he labor so hard to stop the progress of that which is good and to prevent men and women being saved. From him, come . . . wandering thoughts – and roving imaginations; listless minds – and dull memories; sleepy eyes – and fidgety nerves; weary ears – and distracted attention. In all these things, Satan has a great hand. People wonder where they come from and marvel how it is that they find sermons so dull and remember them so badly! They forget the parable of the sower. They forget the devil.

Ryle, J. C.. Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke: A Commentary (Updated Edition) (pp. 157-158). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

Remember the Barren Fig Tree? How it received so much care from the vinedresser? Year after year, hearing God's Word, even having the Spirit of God at work – and yet, no fruit. The Barren Fig Tree, the Fruitless Professor would ultimately be cut down and thrown into the fire because through such a man's own sin, the seed of the Word is never allowed to take root.

Now, let's return to the good soil. Listen to Jesus' description of such a person once more:

(15) As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Holding the Word fast. How many enemies of this divine seed are at work moment by moment to snatch it away? The devil. The world, Our own sin.

2Co 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the

glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Mat 19:21-22 Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (22) When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Here is this infinitely valuable seed, this pearl of great price, this treasure of all treasures...and it comes to us. *If we do not hold it fast, if we do not guard it, if we do not cultivate and nourish it, be assured that an enemy of our soul IS going to snatch it away.*

Holding it Fast

So then, how do we hold the Word fast?

- We must have an honest and good heart. We must be good soil. We must be born again and genuinely desire this Word. We must receive His

Word and believe it and obey it.

- We must be diligent in attending to the means of grace which the Lord has provided for us and which then give God’s Word that water and cultivation needed to grow.
- These means include: Prayer, the reading and studying of the Bible, hearing the Word preached, faithfully gathering together with Christ’s church, obeying His command that we observe His ordinances – baptism and the Lord’s table, confession of and repentance from sin

If we fail to guard the seed of God’s Word given to us, be assured – it is a certainty – it will shrivel and die and be of no benefit to us at all.

But...if we are diligent, if we have come in genuine faith in Christ, to Christ, asking Him to save us, He will transform our hardened, sun-baked, clay-hardened, world-loving hearts into *good soil in which His Word will grow. He is*

the One who gives the increase so that in the end any fruit we produce is His doing and for His glory.

I have included here some more excellent thoughts from our old friend J.C. Ryle-

In the next place, let us learn from this passage, **that there are various ways of hearing the word of God without benefit.** We may listen to a sermon with a heart like the hard "wayside,"--careless, thoughtless, and unconcerned. Christ crucified may be affectionately set before us, and we may hear of His sufferings with utter indifference, as a subject in which we have no interest. Fast as the words fall on our ears, the devil may pluck them away, and we may go home as if we had not heard a sermon at all.

Alas! there are many such hearers! It is as true of them as of the idols of old, "eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not." (Psalm. 135:16,17.)

Truth seems to have no more effect on their hearts than water on a stone.

Or we may listen to a sermon with pleasure, while the impression produced on us is only temporary and short-lived. Our hearts, like the "stony ground," may yield a plentiful crop of warm feelings and good resolutions. But all this time there may be no deeply-rooted work in our souls, and the first cold blast of opposition or temptation may cause our seeming religion to wither away. Alas! there are many such hearers!

The mere love of sermons is no sign of grace. Thousands of baptised people are like the Jews of Ezekiel's day, "You are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they don't do them." (Ezek. 33:32.)

We may listen to a sermon, and approve of every word it contains, and yet get no good from it, in consequence of the

absorbing influence of this world. Our hearts, like the "thorny ground," may be choked with a noxious crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans. We may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet insensibly give it no chance of bearing fruit, by allowing other things to fill a place in our affections, and insensibly to fill our whole hearts.

Alas! there are many such hearers! They know the truth well. They hope one day to be decided Christians. But they never come to the point of giving up all for Christ's sake. They never make up their minds to "seek first the kingdom of God,"--and so die in their sins.

These are points that we ought to weigh well. **We should never forget that there are more ways than one of hearing the word without profit. It is not enough that we come to hear. We may come, and be careless.** It is not enough that we are not careless hearers. Our impressions may be only temporary, and ready to perish. It is not enough that our

impressions are not merely temporary. **But they may be continually yielding no result, in consequence of our obstinate cleaving to the world.** Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt--who can know it?" (Jerem. 17:9.)

In the last place, let us learn from this parable, that there is only one evidence of hearing the word rightly. That evidence is to BEAR FRUIT. The fruit here spoken of is the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance towards God, faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and character, prayerfulness, humility, charity, spiritual-mindedness – these are the only satisfactory proofs that the seed of God's word is doing its proper work in our souls.

Without such proofs, our religion is vain, however high our profession. It is no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Christ has said, "I have chosen you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit." (John 15:16.) There is no part of the whole parable more important than this. **We must**

never be content with a barren orthodoxy, and a cold maintenance of correct theological views. We must not be satisfied with clear knowledge, warm feelings, and a decent profession. We must see to it that the Gospel we profess to love, produces positive "fruit" in our hearts and lives. This is real Christianity.

Those words of James should often ring in our ears, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." (James 1:22.)

Let us not leave these verses without putting to ourselves the important question, "How do WE hear?" We live in a Christian country. We go to a place of worship Sunday after Sunday, and hear sermons. In what spirit do we hear them? What effect have they upon our characters? Can we point to anything that deserves the name of "fruit?" We may rest assured that to reach heaven at last, it needs something more than to go to Church regularly on Sundays, and listen to preachers. The word of

God must be received into our hearts, and become the mainspring of our conduct. It must produce practical impressions on our inward man, that shall appear in our outward behaviour. If it does not do this, it will only add to our condemnation in the day of judgement.

Ryle, J C. Expository thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew (Expository thoughts on the Gospels - J C Ryle Book 1) (pp. 171-174). ICTHUS PRESS. Kindle Edition.