

THE SEED THAT FELL AMONG THORNS—AND INTO GOOD GROUND (Mt 13:1-6; 22-23)

Most of us who have been saved for a period of time—and have faithfully attended a Bible-preaching church—have known people that at one time were faithful—or at least seemed to be—but aren't any more. The question that often comes up when we think of individuals like this is: "Are these people **saved**—and just really **backslidden**—or were they **never saved** in the first place?"

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy of a man who "forsook" him—and presumably "left the faith"—in II Timothy 4:10 "For **Demas** hath forsaken me, having loved this present world..." "Reading between the lines" it seems that Paul considered him as a **backslidden believer**—rather than **an unbeliever** who was now showing his true colors.

Why bring this up? Because the parable of the sower does seem to paint for us a picture of someone who was once fruitful, but had become **unfruitful** due to loving the things of the world. Please take your Bibles and turn once again to Matthew 13; follow along as I read verses 1-8. Now jump ahead to vss 22-23.

Before we look at these last two "soil types," I want to take a couple of minutes to review what we looked at last week.

--**First**, what is a **parable**? It literally means to "place one thing by the side of something else to make a comparison." Probably the easiest definition, though, is an "earthly story with a spiritual meaning."

--**Who** is the unnamed **sower**? Anyone—including Jesus when He walked on earth—who shared **the seed**—meaning the **Word of God**—with others.

--And **the soil** is a picture of **the hearts** of men, women, boys, and girls who **hear** God's Word.

Here again are **four** "rules of thumb" to follow when interpreting parables.

First, look for **one central** truth that ties the parable together.

Second, don't over-allegorize! In other words, **every detail of the story** does not have symbolic meaning so don't look for one—or try to make one!

Third—if applicable—**compare the parable** with its accounts in the other Gospels. For example, this parable is found in Mark 4 and Luke 8. You can save yourself from a lot of misinterpretation by simply comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Fourth, don't use parables to create **new doctrine**! Parables illustrate spiritual truths but should not be the basis for a "belief system" that is not found elsewhere in the Bible. Remember our example last week? Don't believe—and or/teach—**that Satan is everywhere present** just because Jesus compares him **to birds** in this parable!

So what is the **central theme** of this particular parable? One source put it like this: "The Parable of the Sower reveals that the effectiveness of God's Word depends on the **condition of the hearer's heart**, and that true discipleship is shown through **perseverance and fruitfulness**."

One question that inevitably comes up when studying the Parable of the Sower is this: **who** are the ones that are **saved**—and **who** are the ones that **are not**? The parable is about the **condition of the hearts** of the hearers—and **not specifically about salvation**—and yet there is a **salvation** aspect. **How** do we know that?

Because Jesus Himself said that the reason Satan snatches God's Word out of people's hearts is that he doesn't want them to **be saved**! **Luke 8:12** "Those by the way side are they that hear; then **cometh the devil**, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should **believe and be saved**."

So **taking in** God's Word can lead a person **to salvation**—and we know from verse 23 that it also leads to **bearing fruit**! Which soil types represent **saved** people—and which represent those who **are not saved**?

--Some suggest that **only** the **last one**—the good soil—indicates a saved person.

--Others suggest that only the **first one** deals with an unsaved person—and that the **last three** are saved. And since there is no unanimous consensus, we can't be overly dogmatic that we **are right**—and that everyone else **is wrong!** It also means that it is one of those areas where we will probably have to “agree to disagree!”

For what it's worth, I believe the **first two** soil types describe the unsaved—and the **last two** describe people that are saved. And I'll be showing you why I think that throughout the message this morning.

1. The seed that fell among thorns

We have that in verse 7; notice again what it says.

A. The illustration

One thing we need to ask ourselves as we consider the picture is this: Did the sower throw the seeds into a bunch of **thorn bushes**—or were the **roots of the thorns** under the ground and came up with the seeds? It seems like **the latter**, doesn't it? Verse 7 says “the thorns **sprung up**.” Mark 4:7 says, “and the thorns **grew up**...” **Luke 8:7** emphasizes that even more: “And some fell among thorns; and **the thorns sprang up with it**, and choked it.” In my mind, the picture is this: seeds are thrown onto ground that has the roots of thorns beneath the surface.

One commentary put it like this: “In the fields of Israel, weeds were a constant problem, often lying hidden beneath the surface until they sprang up alongside the good seed. When present in sufficient number, they competed aggressively for moisture, sunlight, and nutrients. Their stronger, more established root systems would crowd out the tender roots of the young plant, restricting its growth and draining its life. In time, the good plant, though it may have begun to grow, was effectively strangled, left stunted, barren, and ultimately fruitless.” (<https://www.preceptaustin.org/matthew-13-commentary#13:7>).

That's the picture; let's consider now... B. The explanation

We already know that **the sower** is anyone who spreads the seed—and that **the seed** is the Word of God. But what about **the plants** that grew up **with thorns**?

1) The “plant” was not “rootless.” Last week we noted—in all three Gospels—that the seed that fell upon **stony places** had no root! But here—regarding the seed that fell among thorns—**the root** is not mentioned. --The assumption, then, is that **it did** have a root. Although an argument from silence, it is still a valid one. And in Luke 8:7—a verse we looked at earlier—we read that it did **spring up with** the thorns.

2) It became unfruitful. We see that in verse 22 “...and he **becometh** unfruitful.” **Mark 4:19** says basically the same thing: “...and it **becometh** unfruitful.” It seems to me that for something to **become unfruitful**, it had to **bear fruit** at one time. **Luke 8:14** says it a little differently: “...and bring no fruit to perfection.” Once again, that seems to suggest that there **was fruit**—but that it did **not mature or ripen**.

So what's the explanation? Is this a **lost** person—that showed “signs of life”—but was never really saved? Or...is this a **saved** person who at one time lived for God, but **then stopped**?

I lean toward it being a **saved person** that lived for God at one time, but then “cooled off” and gradually stopped. **Why?** Because—as already pointed out—they **became** unfruitful—implying they bore fruit at one time. Not only that, we have...

3) Examples of those who were **unfruitful**.

--I mentioned **Demas** in the introduction. He forsook Paul—and presumably the Lord—“having loved this present world.” That sure fits in with “the deceitfulness of riches” in vs 22...and “the lusts of other things” (Mk 4:19) ...and “pleasures in this life” (Lk 8:14).

--**Peter** gives us another example of an **unfruitful believer**—a man by the name of Lot! **II Peter 2:7-8** “And delivered **just** Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: ⁸ (For that **righteous** man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his **righteous** soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)”

You would be hard-pressed to find **even one thing** in the Old Testament that would lead you to believe that Lot was a man who was right with God. And yet God had Peter call him **righteous**—which in the New Testament refers to someone who is a **child of God!**

Was God's Word “choked” in Lot's life?

Let's just say that there are things that Lot **said and did**—recorded for us in the Bible—that I would not feel comfortable reading out loud with children in here!

Now for... C. The application

Rather than look at these things as **hindrances** to salvation, I want to view them as things that will **choke God's Word** in our lives as believers (if you are) and stop us from being fruitful. If we look at **all three** gospels, there are **four** of them.

1) Care(s) of this world (Mt 13:22; Mk 4:19; Lk 8:14).

--The word **care** means to be "anxious" or "worried." **Anxious** or **worried** about what? The things that pertain to **this life!** Jesus—in Matthew 6—referred to things we often worry about, things like "what we shall eat...or what we shall drink...or what we should wear."

--But that's not all we worry about! We worry about how we are going to **pay** our bills...and the **health** of our loved ones...and **getting things fixed** that are broken...and **getting things done** that need to be done!

--And worry for those kinds of things can lead us to be so **overwhelmed** with our responsibilities—like Moses was in Numbers 11—that **we neglect** church...and Bible reading...and prayer—**the very things we need** to help us grow spiritually...and bear fruit...and not worry!

2) The deceitfulness of riches (Mt 13:22; Mk 4:19; Lk 8:14).

--**Are** riches deceitful? They certainly are! **How** do they deceive?

--They deceive by claiming to be able to buy **anything**—but they can't buy **happiness, heaven, or holiness!**

--They deceive by claiming to be **everlasting**, but riches have wings—and can leave at a moment's notice!

Proverbs 23:5 "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven."

--And—sadly—our hearts deceive us into **trusting riches** instead of the living God (I Timothy 6:17).

--'But Pastor, I don't think any of us have that problem because none of us are rich!' That may be true, but you can **desire** that which you don't have—and your pursuit of it can become a thorn that chokes God's Word!

3) The lusts of other things (Mk 4:19).

--What kind of things? Ever hear the phrase "wine, women, and song?" Not sure where the phrase came from, but **Solomon** wrote in Ecclesiastes 2 that **he** pursued **all three!** But the "lusts of other things" is not just about pursuing **what is wrong**—we can also pursue **good** things for the **wrong** reasons, can't we? We can strive to excel in something to have **fame**—and the **praise of men!**

--But let's not forget that Jesus Himself said in **Luke 16:15b** "...for that which is **highly esteemed** among men is an **abomination** in the sight of God."

--So if you love and pursue that which **men** think highly of—and God thinks **the opposite about**—then God's Word will be **choked** in your life—**not obeyed!**

4) Pleasures in this life (Lk 8:14).

Here's a quote I found fascinating—and extremely relevant. "Amusement should be used to do us 'good like medicine'; it must never be used as the **food** of the individual.... This is the age of excessive amusement. Everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men and women had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age."

--The **author?** Charles Spurgeon. **When** was it written? The late 1800s! Imagine what he would write now about our craze for movies, music, and sports!

--Can the **desire for entertainment** choke God's Word in our life? I'll answer the question by asking a question: I wonder how many **people miss church on Sunday** mornings because of their **entertainment choices** for Saturday night?

--Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 3:4 that perilous times shall come and that one of the characteristics would be that men are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God!"

--Is it any wonder God's Word is choked in our lives when we spend so much time **pursuing pleasure**—and so little time **pursuing God?**

Next, let's consider... **2. The seed that fell into the good ground**

--We see that in vs 8; notice what it says: "But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit..."

--Mark 4:8 says it "did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth..."

--Luke 8:8 also says that it "sprang up, and bore fruit..." We'll talk about **the amount** in a little bit.

A. The illustration

--Pretty self-explanatory, right?

--The seed landed in good soil...and germinated...and grew...and bore fruit—just like it was supposed to do!

--Some soil produced more fruit than the other soil, but they all produced a lot of fruit!

B. The explanation

1) The good ground. The "good ground" is referred to in Mt 13:23 and Mark 4:20. But notice how Luke puts it in **Luke 8:15** "But that on the good ground are they, which in an **honest and good heart...**"

--**What is** "an honest and good heart?"

--"Honest" comes from the Greek word "kah-los" which carries the idea of honorable, noble, and valuable

--"Good" comes from the Greek word "ag-ath-os" which **means inherently good**; goodness from within

--So is Jesus **denying the truth** of Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?"

--Is He **contradicting His own teaching**, seen in Mark 7:21-23, where He states: "For from within, **out of the heart of men**, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, ...murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness..., and pride?"

--And is He saying that some people **don't have** a sin nature—and are **inherently good**?

No! Jesus is **not** teaching that, and this is another "case in point" of being careful not to **create new doctrine** from a parable! So what is Jesus saying?

--**My take** on it is this: Since none of us **are born with** this kind of heart, I believe this describes how a saved person—someone who has been given a new heart and new nature—responds to the Word of God! In other words, it is not about the condition of a heart **before** a person comes to Christ for salvation—it is how a person ought to respond to the Word of God **after** they are born again!

--Not only that, salvation from the penalty of our sins is **instantaneous**—not a process! And plants producing fruit is a process—not instantaneous!

And that brings us to...**2) The response to God's Word.**

--**What** does Jesus say is **the response** of a true, born-again, blood-bought child of God to God's Word?

--Here in Matthew 13, he **hears** it—meaning he takes it in. But he doesn't just hear it **once!** It is in the **present tense**, meaning he is continually hearing it.

--He also **understands** it. Of the Greek word that "understand" comes from, the Topical Lexicon states: "In the New Testament, it consistently portrays a level of perception **deeper than mere information-gathering**; it is spiritual insight granted by God..." (<https://biblehub.com/greek/4920.htm>). This, too, seems to point to the person already being saved. Once again, it is in the **present tense** meaning the person continually understands.

--In Mark 4:20, Jesus says this person also **receives** God's Word. It is more than a normal "reception," however. It means to **eagerly and whole-heartedly welcome** because of personal interest. And—we're seeing a pattern here—it is again in the **present tense**—meaning we are to continually be whole-heartedly welcoming God's Word into our hearts and minds and lives!

--And in Luke 8:15, we are to **keep**—meaning "hold fast to; keep secure"—God's Word. In other words, grip strongly the message of God's Word—and keep on gripping it that way!

3) The resulting fruit.

--**How much** fruit will you bear? Here in Matthew, it says, "some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Mark gives **the same** numbers—in **reverse** order—and Luke just says, "a hundredfold."

--**What** are we to make of the numbers 30, 60, and 100? **Nothing**—other than it is a lot!

--What **kind** of fruit will we bear? It doesn't say, does it?

--But since **the seed** is the Word of God, the **fruit** will be that which God's Word produces. Things like:

--The **fruit of the Spirit** as found in Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

--The fruit of **good works**. Colossians 1:10 "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being **fruitful in every good work...**"

--The fruit of **gratitude**. Hebrews 13:15 "By Him therefore let us offer the **sacrifice of praise** to God continually, that is, **the fruit of our lips giving thanks** to His name."

--The fruit of **introducing others** to salvation in Christ. In Romans 1:13, Paul tells the believers in Rome that he wants to come there to preach the gospel "that I might have some **fruit among you** also."

Lastly, let's consider... C. The Application

What does God want us to take away from this fruit-bearing example? Time doesn't allow me to elaborate too much on them, but here are **three** truths:

1) We need to prepare our heart by keeping it soft and removing the thorns!

--God tells us through the **prophet Joel** that we are to "...rend [tear] our hearts, not our garments" (Joel 2:13).

--And God tells us through the **prophet Jeremiah** to "**Break up** your fallow ground, and sow not **among thorns.**"

--How do we break our hearts—and get rid of thorns? **Jeremiah 23:29** "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" God's Word will show you **what the thorns are**—so you can get rid of them! And God's Word will **break your hard heart!**

2) We need to purposely pursue God's Word in order to grow! The seed is the word of God—and the Word of God needs to be "planted" in the heart. And—and already mentioned—it is something we need to be doing continually—not just once in a while! We need to be continually hearing...and receiving...and understanding... and holding onto it tightly!

--**I Peter 2:2** "As newborn babes, **desire** the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"

3) We need to be persuaded of the truth that we will grow if we put in the work—and allow God to work on us! We have the proof—and the promise—from Jesus here in this parable. When we do what God says, fruit will come. God decides if it will be 30, 60, or 100-fold—but **we will bear fruit** if we take in the seed—and keep our hearts soft and weed free! So be encouraged—but also be **doing your part**—because we will reap if we faint not!

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, **what kind** of fruit are you bearing? When people look at your life—your attitudes and activities—do they see a person that is trying to be like Jesus—or someone who is blending in with the world?

2. Second, do you **desire** to bear fruit? Jesus said in **John 15:8** "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be **my** disciples." If you are a child of God, you should want God to be honored...and known about...and praised.

--The Holy Spirit puts that desire within you.

--If you don't have that desire, are you really a child of God?

3. Third, how's **your heart**? Is it hard? Is it full of thorns—distractions—that choke out God's Word in your life?

4. Lastly, do you **desire** the word of God? Do you want to hear it...and receive it...and obey it? You are not serious about bearing fruit if you neglect what will produce fruit—God's Word!