

The Sower

Matthew 13:18-23

A Sermon for Children

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:18-23).

Introduction

Recently on Facebook a friend recommendation came my way. The person was a former member of our church who I was friends with and whose company I truly enjoyed. His job situation had changed years back which made his church attendance difficult. He had assured me that he would work it out and thanked me for calling him. Since then we lost contact. I took a quick look at his Facebook page and saw his favorite authors were now atheists. I made a couple of quick phone calls only to find my fears were warranted. He had become an atheist. This is not the first time I had seen this.

Years ago another gentleman who was a member of our church became an atheist and wrote a book about it. After almost forty years of being a Christian and thirty in the ministry I have lost track of how many people I know who have professed faith in Christ only to deny it later. But I do remember, as a teenager, the first time I observed this. It was a girl in our Bible study who was the most enthusiastic Christian in the group. She always spoke up and shared her views of how wonderful it was to be a

Christian. She was faithful at sharing her faith with others. But then she met a boy who was not a Christian and we never saw her again.

Many people follow, and then cease to follow, Jesus. This would happen during the course of His earthly ministry (John 6:66); it would happen during the time of the apostles (1 John 2:19) and it happens to this day. This parable explains why. This parable has very direct application to the young people in our church. And the reason I say that is because you're here.

This parable does not address those who have a predisposition of hostility to God's word. It does not address those who have not heard the gospel. The four types of people represented in this parable have all had some type of deep interaction with the gospel. These are all people who either go to church or are well acquainted with what is taught (or at least should be taught) in church.

I would like us all to ask ourselves which person in this parable we are. Hopefully we all think we're the fourth person. Nonetheless, as we give the words of Jesus our full attention, we may wish to examine, at what level, the things happening to the first three people are happening to us. Are we dismissive of God's word? Are we surrounded by tribulation and persecution which by which we are discouraged – causing us to stumble? Do the cares of this world – deceitfulness and riches – choke us? Or are we indeed fruitful?

The Planted Word

Just for clarification this is a parable of a sower – one who is planting seeds. The soil in which the seeds are planted are the hearts of men. The seed itself is the word of the kingdom. And although much can be said of the kingdom, suffice it to say for now that the heart of the word of the kingdom is that Jesus, the King of the kingdom, came to ransom sinners from the due consequences of their thoughts and actions (Matthew 20:28). He suffered the death, wrath and condemnation that we deserved and grants the fullness of His righteousness and life (2 Corinthians 5:21) to those who by grace through faith, trust in Him.

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and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside (Matthew 13:18, 19).

Doesn't Understand

The first of the four in this parable is a person who hears the gospel and does not *understand* it. The Greek verb, συνιεντος *synientos* means primarily “to bring together, perceive, comprehend and have insight into.” So understanding at least includes somehow working it out in our heads – getting it together. A person’s lack of willingness to understand results in the devil coming and snatching “**away what was sown in his heart.**” And a person’s lack of willingness to understand is a result of a hard heart. Jesus explains:

But Jesus, being aware of *it*, said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened (Mark 8:17)?

For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened (Mark 6:52).

Some people have a hard heart to the things of God. The result of this is that they will not understand. When I tell my children to do something and then ask if they understand, with that question comes an assumption on my part that they will act upon what I’ve said. With true understanding comes a proper response.

Jesus informs us that while all this is rattling around in this man’s head, the enemy (the devil – Luke 8:12), snatches away what was sown in his heart. The world and the flesh, as we shall soon see, may take a little time to perform their dissuasive actions. The devil, on the other hand, is quick to act.

While the gospel, in a sense, hangs in this man’s heart/mind (Proverbs 23:7), appearing to be foolish “**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**” (1 Corinthians 1:18), the devil snatches the message away and he is left in his sin and darkness.

The enemy does not want his victim to spend any more time pondering the gospel. He snatches it away and this first man just goes on about his business while the cancer of his sin continues to grow.

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles (Matthew 13:20, 21).

The Seasonal Christian

Next we have the seasonal Christian Jesus who only endures **“for a while”**, προσκαιρος (*proskairos*) literally for a season. Unlike the first person, there is a clear initial response. Jesus uses the word **“receive”** λαμβανων *lambanon* which means to **“take hold of”**. Same verb as John 1:12 – **“to as many as received Him, He gave right to become children of God”**.

This person has excitedly received the word of God. It’s not merely rattling around in his skull, it’s embraced. We see an immediate transition from pagan to the front row of church shouting his ‘Amens’. He goes to four Bible studies a week, has long quiet times and a worn out Family Christian Center discount card. But as quickly as he went from pagan to Christian, he can go from Christian to pagan.

This person has no root in himself. There is no depth of understanding, thought or conviction. He changes his mind at the drop of a hat. It always makes me a bit nervous when a person comes to one church service or Bible study and makes an immediate declaration of their massive conversion. Have they truly thought about it? Have they, as Jesus taught, **“counted the cost (Luke 14:28)?”**

This shallow convert will turn tail as soon as tribulation or persecution arises because of their faith. It should not be thought that pain and discomfort somehow disappears when a person comes to faith in Christ. True faithfulness does not mean that pain and death won’t touch you.

Our roots must go deeper than how we feel. By definition, the spiritual man, does not depend on how he feels. Spirit is immaterial,

feelings are material. There is much in Christendom today with the label of *spirit* which is quite the opposite.

By the way, this is the person who experiences tribulation and persecution *because of his faith*. To greater and lesser degrees throughout history the world has weighed heavy upon Christians. It may not be physical, but there is definitely academic persecution taking place in our country today. I am always concerned for you young people when going off to college where you will be ridiculed for your faith – it is our prayer that this will not cause you to stumble. I think it should be mandatory for every one of our young people going off to college to thoughtfully listen to the *Taking it to the Streets* series by Dr. Greg Bahnsen to prepare you for what you'll hear. The truly faithful are called to endure to the end (Matthew 10:22).

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

Surrounded by Thorns

The third participant in this parable is not said to have shallow soil. He may have deep roots indeed. But he has many roots moving in many directions. He may have thought long and hard and deep about his love for God, but he also has an unhealthy love for the world. He is surrounded by the thorns of the age. He hasn't sufficiently removed them from his heart.

Then it dawns on him that his faith is keeping him from acquiring those things necessary for his own happiness. Life, for this man, is not the enjoyment of God and what God has in store on any given day. This man needs his barns to be stocked, overstocked (Luke 12:18) in order to be at peace. This man needs to read Psalm 73 and 37 over and over.

Truly God *is* good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I *was* envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:1-3).

Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring *it* to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass (Psalm 37:1-7).

This man is having a love affair with the world. He is trying to serve two masters. Jesus has earlier taught,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).

God is a God of truth. Riches can be very deceitful. Ambivalence between the two can prove fatal. He is just too in love with the world and its false promises. During weddings I tell the couple that of all the things God has given you in this world, nothing comes before your spouse – they are to be #1! Then I give a little bit of advice – whatever #2 is, it wants to be #1. That is the nature of #2.

But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

The Fruitful

This is the true convert. The Apostle John explained the genuine nature of the first three (or at least two and three)?

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us (1 John 2:19).

The true convert hears the word, understands it and bears fruit. The understanding may not be thorough but it is genuine and humble.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).

The fruit (true effort to obey the law of God) may be abundant or scant but there is fruit. And apart from fruit one should not delude themselves into thinking their faith is a saving faith (James 2:18). And although we should all endeavor to produce much fruit, this teaching seems to indicate that genuine faith is not determined by the amount of fruit but by the endurance and perseverance in the faith.

The true convert, in all his weakness and failures, never stops seeking to obey God and the true convert ever trusts in Jesus and Jesus alone to rescue him from the due penalty of his sins. It is our prayer that that would include all in our church family.

Questions for Study

1. In the Parable of the Sower what is the seed? What is the soil? (page 2)?
2. What happened to the first person in the parable? Why does this happen (pages 4, 5)?
3. Discuss the “seasonal Christian.” Why does he stumble (page 5)?
4. What are the “thorns” in the third person’s life (pages 6, 7)?
5. How do we avoid serving two masters (page 7)?
6. What does a true believe continue to do (pages 7, 8)?