

THE SOIL MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE - HOW WE DETERMINE TRANSFORMATION BY WHERE WE DRAW THE LINE OF OUR HEARING (Part 3)

MATTHEW 13:1-9 - "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] 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. [9] He who has ears, let him hear."

We've spent two Sundays tapping into the truths of this wonderful parable about how the Word is like seed landing upon our hearts. The story is crafted in such a way that the idea of hearing the Word in a way that brings **results** is so obviously paralleled with the way seed doesn't just remain **itself** when it enters the soil. It becomes something **bigger** than itself. Seed turns into **fruit**. That's obviously what Jesus was emphasizing. The Word, properly heard, doesn't remain print on paper or words in a sermon. The seed **transcends** itself. It carries **fruit** in its own nature. Its very nature is to **transform**.

So far we've studied **three** truths from this parable:

- 1) **All transformation begins with the Word seriously heard.** Just as the Word is compared by Jesus to **seed**, so the beginning of transformation is **fertilized** by the Word. Life doesn't come from **nowhere**. It must be **germinated**. And the Word of God is the starting place for spiritual transformation.

While there are many different **parts** to the Christian life, you can't **start** spiritual life just anywhere you choose. Spiritual life doesn't **start** in worship. It doesn't **start** with service and kindness. It **results** in all of those things, but it only **begins** with the hearing of the seed of the Word. This insures that we don't try to **define** the Christian life on our own terms.

- 2) ***The power of the Word can't germinate in a life too entrenched in stubborn personal patterns of living.*** The habit of creating the patterns of my life without reference to the Word of God creates what Jesus called "***wayside soil***" or a packed down "***path***. And the seed, while ***landing*** on this packed down soil, can't ***penetrate*** it. Jesus said the birds swoop down and gobble it up.

If you ***know*** the Word but don't ***live*** the Word it actually closes your heart to be transformed by the Word. A lady recently told me she left her Christian husband because all he ever did was relate everything in life to the Bible. But isn't that how ***seed*** works? What part of a tomato plant isn't the direct result of its seed? What part of an apple tree isn't directly produced and shaped an apple seed?

Hearing the Word means training your mind to see everything else through the counter-cultural lens of God's Word. That's what Christianity ***is***. It's having the whole of your life grow, not out of your own fallen desires, but out of the seed of God's Word deeply heard and responded to in your heart. Your whole life is the plant that grows from that seed. If you're a Christian at all, that's the only kind there is.

- 3) ***The germinating power of God's Word in my life will be short-lived until the unyielding areas under the surface of my visible life are broken up and removed.*** Jesus said it was like seed that germinated quickly in the soil, but couldn't put down deep roots because, under the surface of the life, out of sight, were rocks that prevented a solid root base. The quickly germinating plan couldn't last long.

Today we come to the ***fourth*** idea presented by Jesus in this parable:

- 4) **INTAKE OF THE WORD IS NOT ENOUGH TO ENSURE ITS GROWTH IN THE HEART**

Matthew 13:7 - "Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them."

And then this explanation of those words from the parable:

Matthew 13:22 - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the

word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

When I was a kid, we used to sing the Sunday School chorus, “Read your Bible, pray every day and you’ll grow, grow, grow.” All in all, it was a pretty good song. But it didn’t quite tell the whole truth. It isn’t enough to read your Bible and pray every day. You have to be doing something else with quite a bit of courage and diligence.

You have to ***pull out weeds and thorns by the roots***. Jesus identifies two parasites that, if left to grow along side the Word, will win every time - ***the cares of this world***, and ***the deceitfulness of wealth***. These are the ***tapeworms*** of the life of the Spirit.

You can’t just put the Word ***in***. You have to take these two parasites ***out***. Those ***two weeds*** are deeply related. They are ***immediate family members***, not ***distant cousins***:

A) FIRST, THE CARES OF THIS WORLD ARE THE OBVIOUS CENTERS OF WORLDLY ATTENTION

Security, happiness, popularity, pleasure, and all-round well being. Those are the goals of all citizens of planet earth. We all ***feel the pressure*** to achieve them.

B) SECOND, THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES COMES IN PRECISELY AT THIS POINT.

We live in a world that is under the sway of the ***father of all lies***. And the biggest and most successful lie he tells is that ***riches is the answer to those cares of this world***. Wealth will answer to those concerns in a way nothing else can.

And here’s the punch-line from Jesus. ***If you believe that, put your Bible away. It will do you no good. You can’t spread the seed of the Word over the soil of that colossal lie***. Before the Word can bring its fruitful life into the soil of your mind, you must set a brush fire to the lies of the age. This is what the life of faith is all about. ***Faith*** means rejecting anything else as ultimately satisfying or meaningful. Faith means carving out all false affections. Faith means building the goals and aspirations of your whole life around the promises of God’s Word.

Faith means saying with David - **"...the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward"**(Psalm 19:8-11).

Without that attitude there is no point in taking up God's Word because it will constantly be ***telling you things you won't believe***. It's going to tell you to lose all of the paltry rags this world calls life. And they won't seem like rags to you. It will tell you that true joy is found in giving every ounce of energy and strength to spending your life in sacrificial, time consuming effort for Christ's kingdom. And that will seem like nonsense to you.

This Word will tell you that dying is gain for Jesus. It will tell you that you are blessed when people persecute you for Jesus' sake. It will tell you that the hunger for God is better than the hunger for riches.

And here's the point. ***None of the central truths of the Word is believable to the worldly mind***. None of it makes sense to those who give as much time to the world's weeds as they do to the seed of God's truth.

Jesus says that until the weeds are rejected as lies and ripped up by the roots they will choke out the preciousness of God's life giving truth.

Paul says the same thing with equal forcefulness:

1 Timothy 6:9-12 - "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [11] But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. [12] Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

What is the **“good fight of the faith”**(12)? Paul tells us. It’s pushing back the encroaching lie of **verses 9 and 10**. If you don’t resist and push back the moguls of this age will steal your mind’s capacity to rest in the saving beauty and glory of God’s Word.

Those are such scary words for prosperous people like us. They are designed to shake us up. We’re supposed to assume **we** can be blind and deceived like that. It doesn’t happen over night. You don’t wake up one morning and renounce Jesus because you want to become a millionaire. It happens slowly, gradually, the way weeds grow.

5) **IN A GOOD HEART, THE WORD CAN PRODUCE RESULTS FAR BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL’S OWN STRENGTH OR ABILITY**

Matthew 13:8-9 - “Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:23 - “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

I used to think those measurements of fruitfulness (100, 60 and 30 fold) were fixed limits. So pastor Chris is a hundred folder, pastor Chad, a sixty folder, and pastor Don, sorry - thirty fold.

I don’t think that’s what Jesus was trying to say.

And then there’s the fact that Mark reverses those numbers in his gospel, moving from 30 to 60 to 100. Which shows that the order of increase or decrease isn’t fixed or inevitable. Spiritual flux is tied to **hearing**. And we draw the line at where we will **stop** or **respond**.

Remember Jesus’ strong words in **verse 12** - “**For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.**” That’s the verse being fulfilled in the closing words of this parable. The numbers (30, 60, 100) are **living** numbers. They never stay the same. And that truth is meant to both **warn** and **comfort**.

The **warning** is geared to people like me, who can add up accumulated years of service and study. I can build quite a pile of my past life and actually feel I've established **credit** with God that **frees me up to "pass" on the next summons of the Spirit to obedience.** And the moment I do that, all that I've piled up in terms of past devotion or service disappears. If I continue in spiritual neglect that final number in Matthew's account can go much lower than **30**.

But there's also tremendous **comfort** in these closing remarks. They answer to an old fear that all of us have. And Jesus relates the power of His Word to deal with this fear: "God has things for other people, but they will never develop in my life. Other people might move on to great spiritual heights, but I'll never get out of this rut."

And then, to make matters worse, the Devil comes along to cement those feelings in our minds: "That's right. You're a single parent. Your kids never will turn out any good." "That's right. Your marriage wasn't established on Biblical grounds. You never will find happiness with your present spouse." "That's right. You never will beat that battle with pornography. You're too weak. You've tried before and you failed. You'll fail again." "That's right. This sermon will work for other people. But it will never work for you." "You've had an abortion." "You've been divorced."

I wonder, how many millions of times in millions of ways, in churches around the world today, those words will be whispered - **reinforced** - in the minds of Christians as the Seed of the Word is planted into their circumstances. I wonder how many people will lose hope before they even start.

Friend, please hear me. If you've never taken seriously anything said in church before, hear this. God's Word is full of **power**. The same Holy Spirit who was involved churning up the work of creation in Genesis chapter one - the same Holy Spirit who miraculously came upon a young virgin and brought about the birth of our Savior without conception with a man - **that's** the Holy Spirit who indwells God's Word and carries into any heart that wills to seriously hear.

The Word has power to multiply in your heart. True, it has to be received in faith and obedience. True, you must root out all competing counsel that would argue with God's revealed truth. But for those who will humbly receive the engrafted Word, James says it will **save your soul!** It will multiply in power beyond all your imagination.

No wonder, at the end of His parable, Jesus says, ***“He who has ears, let him hear!”***(9) That’s not just Jesus’ way of saying, ***“OK fellas, listen up. I want to tell you something.”*** This is Jesus telling you and me to really work hard at ***hearing*** this with faith and passion. This is Jesus telling you and me that this is the starting place for everything. It isn’t your strength or will power that will win the day. Welcome the Word. Hear it today. Embrace it with all your might. Don’t second guess your obedience to Him.

And watch the fruit grow!