

The Parable of the Sower



Jesus of Nazareth often instructed people with stories that presented hypothetical case studies concerning the teachings of the Scriptures. He explained that He talked about God's previously hidden mysteries in this way so that His listeners could grasp Heavenly principles through earthly models with which they could relate. Jesus often taught in parables--descriptions about physical realities that reflected spiritual rules invisible to normal human sight. Jesus was sensitive to the fact that His listeners could identify better with what they already had experienced than what they had not.

This method of guidance is like a grade school teacher instructing a class in elementary mathematics. Instead of merely telling the students the fundamentals of addition and subtraction or using a blackboard, an effective teacher employs tangible objects, like coins, in order to demonstrate what the students need to learn. Recognizing and taking into account the pupils' level of understanding is the best way to guide them to the desired perceptions. Jesus said that in order to grasp any/all of the rest of His parables it was essential to comprehend the following one. All others were indecipherable without this story being understood; for, it was the foundation upon which all of the others were based.

"When He was alone those around him with the twelve asked Him about the parable and He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? Then hear the Parable of the Sower. The parable is this:

*'The Sower sows the Word and these are the ones **by the wayside** where the Word is sown. When anyone hears the Word of the Kingdom and does not understand it, Satan comes immediately and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts lest they believe and be saved. This is he who received the seed by the wayside.*

*These likewise are the ones sown **on stony ground**, who when they hear the Word immediately receive It with joy (and) gladness, yet they have no root in themselves and so endure (only) for a while. Afterward, when tribulation, or persecution, or temptation arises because of the Word immediately they stumble (and) fall away.*

*Now, these are the ones who received seed **among thorns**. They are the ones who hear the Word, go out, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, (the) pleasures of life, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word and It becomes unfruitful. They bring no fruit to maturity.*

*But, these are the ones sown **on good ground**, those who hear the Word and understand it with a noble and good heart, accept it, keep it, and indeed bear fruit with patience, and produce some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundred." (Matthew:13:18-23 & Mark 4:13-20 & Luke 8:11-15)*

1) By the wayside:

In the initial incident that Jesus mentioned, Satan instantaneously arrived on the scene. He appeared merely to steal the Word out of the believer's heart. His interest only reflected his motive to circumvent God's desires. The devil had no personal vendetta against anyone but the Trinity. Satan obviously was on the lookout because he located and went to the new believer, not the reverse. The individual did not have to go searching for a way to test his/her new faith; Satan was ready and eager to do it. He wanted to steal the Word away from them by any means.

The moment we hear and have faith in God's will for our lives the Word begins to affect us. Instantaneously afterward a representative from Satan's kingdom will be dispatched to try to convince us that what we learned was not genuine, that it was not from the Holy Spirit. The devil will attempt to persuade us that we have not read or heard God's teachings correctly; that what we perceived is not logical, nor is it a reasonable or logical course of action to pursue.

The Bible says that when any person does not understand the Word is when it is the easiest for Satan to abduct. When we do not comprehend any instruction we are likely to forget it because our minds did not process and assimilate the information into our memory like an idea that we perceived did have relevance for us. Correspondingly, which is harder to uproot and steal, a seed, a sapling, or a full-grown tree? Satan is treacherous, but he is not stupid. We never should underestimate his intelligence or cunning. We are not equipped with our finite human minds or bodies to overpower a rebellious spirit with the centuries of experience that the devil has had to observe mankind and learn our weakest points. Nor do we have to; Jesus already accomplished it in our place. Therefore, the best thing we can do is let God handle him, just as He did in Heaven.

2) On stony ground:

The second example in the parable concerned people who did follow the Word, but only until they reached a certain level of persecution or tribulation. They then discarded what they heard, but not entirely. They floundered a while in their diligence and conviction first. Satan might have harassed them in some way, caused distress of some kind, or provoked anxiety about something else in their daily lives (as he did to a man named Job). These people finally chose to discard God's influence over Satan's. Again, he solely wanted to rob them of the Gospel and did not really care at all who they were as individuals.

This is a completely useless place to be spiritually. When we vacillate between belief and doubt God can do little for us because our unbelief will cancel out His faith, as well as erode the remains of ours. Consequently, we will remain sluggish, going back and forth with no progress unless we repent and move in line with Him again. We will continue to be in motion, but in a forward/backward pattern, often nullifying what we still will accept from God.

3) Among thorns:

The third illustration concerned the people whose faith was overcome by anxiety and lust. They tried to accumulate as many material goods as possible in order to feel secure. They were more concerned with tangible things, other people, and what was considered successful in this world than listening to God and observing His consummate will for their lives. The more things and responsibilities they acquired, the easier it became to ignore God. Instead of being the center of their lives He became just another appendage.

Something in this category happened to the apostle Paul. He was a man who intimately knew God's character, however even he was not immune to Satan's influences. He was not anxious about wealth and comfort, but he was concerned daily about the churches with which he was in contact. Apparently, that was a chink in his Spiritual armor that affected him enough that he asked God to get rid of the evil influence for him. When he prayed, instead of taking the "thorn" away God directed him to apply his faith more and it

would grow stronger. Thus, Paul learned and became more resilient to Satan's attacks. (Notice, the "thorn" came from Satan, not God. He does not want to thwart our search for Him. If He did, why give us His Word, or His Son?)

"Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations a thorn in the flesh was given to me-a messenger from Satan to buffet me lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me and He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness.' Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For, when I am weak then I am strong." (II Corinthians 12:7-10)

Usually these individuals allow their daily schedules, and their own as well as others' possessions attract more of their attention than God's Word. For them, God is just fine as long as He remains in a limited space. However, they try to keep Him confined outside the boundaries of their main interests. He most definitely is not the principle focus of their busy, important lives until a crisis invades their world. Only then might they search for His help, until the problem subsides. Jesus spoke about these people in this manner:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For, where your treasure is there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

Jesus added that no one could serve two masters; we must choose to obey one or the other. This is an on going, daily, if not momentarily process. What will we do right now, study the Word, or do something else? Which decision will contribute to our being closer to God? Which either will do nothing positive for, or even possibly retard our health? Our choices continually increase or erode away at our faith in God's will and abilities.

"These things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:14-17)

We all regularly fluctuate among all of the above three disagreeable characteristics, on each issue confronting us at any given second of our lives. Unfortunately, too often we have a stronger tendency to let our surrounding circumstances affect us more than what the Word teaches. We must learn to be more consistent to pray and study the Bible if we ever desire to feel or see any permanent spiritual progress.

"Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is not." (Matthew 26:41)

4) On good ground:

The good ground was remarkable because these people were not perfect either. First of all, they could not be because the Word states that we all have come up short of God's glory. Regardless of how faithfully we attempt succeed in pleasing Him only Jesus of Nazareth ever was a perfect person. We all still need grace--the free and undeserved gift

that Jesus presented to us. He is our pattern for what is good enough to get into Heaven, not any other human beings' lives or opinions.

"We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves, but they measuring themselves by themselves, are not wise." (II Corinthians 10:12)

"Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on Jesus' breast at the supper and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'

Peter, seeing Him, said to Jesus, 'But Lord, what about this man?'

Jesus said to him, 'If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.'" (John 21:20-22)

We are foolish when we compare ourselves to another human being or group of people. Whenever we say things like, "Did you see what X did?" or, "I would never...." we are doing nothing more than judging others, thereby putting ourselves even further away from God than we may have been before. God is not impressed when we see ourselves as being superior to other people; in fact, He hates it.

What about those believers in the parable of the Sower who merely produced a thirty or even a sixty fold return? If a person produces only thirty they still fall short of perfection by seventy percent, which is a low failing grade in any school. Jesus' placement of these numbers within the "good ground" group suggests the overwhelming abundance of God's grace and mercy towards mankind. Clearly, He picks up the slack even for our unproductive efforts when we are mindful of attempting to follow His will. No matter how hard we try though we still need Jesus' assistance to "go the distance"; and He always will be there.

"(Jesus) condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:3-4)

By the way, we can be assured also that the above lists in the parable concerning Satan's tests comprise his total arsenal of weapons that he uses against humanity. He cannot even try to beguile or torment us in any other manner. God will not let him.

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able but with the temptation will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it." (I Corinthians 10:13)

As with every teaching in the Bible, the above remains true for believers today. We have to keep in mind that God's Word never changes because He never changes. God would not have empowered Jesus' original disciples with anything more than we still have access to now. Likewise, it is our own decision what we will accept or reject, including health, and persevere towards achieving God's wishes, no matter how long that journey may take. We have to find out how to uproot any old seeds of doubt, fear, or rebellion that we have planted in the spirit world with our words. At the same time we must sow new ones and keep them in, as Jesus said, "good ground". This is not easy to do, nor is it always fun, but it is possible, and eventually exceedingly rewarding.