

The Parable of the Sower

Scripture: Matthew 13:1 - 9 & 18 – 23

Our parable today is the Parable of the Sower. During this message I will also share three stories that I think illustrate the Parable of the Sower.

In the ancient Greek world, learning to maturity involved a three step process. The first step is - knowledge which means becoming acquainted with a truth.

The second step is - understanding which means grasping of the truth and the ability to put it into words.

And the final step is - maturity which comes in wisdom as one applied truth in life.

So here again are the three steps of learning - knowledge of truth, understanding of truth, and maturity of truth as applied in your life.

Jesus in the parable of the Sower describes the first soil as someone who hears the Word of the Kingdom and does not understand it. Birds will come and eat up the newly scattered seeds. The birds represent the devil who snatches God's truth from those who have not understood it.

Before we can apply God's Word to our lives we must know and understand it. For us that takes cultivation. That takes time to study the Word of God. That takes time to meditate on the Word. It takes time - one of our most precious commodities.

We must not only hear the Word, but we must listen deeply to it. We must not only read the Word, but we must mediate on it. It is, after all, an alien word from another kingdom that Jesus brings. We must study it and paraphrase it. We need to eat the scroll like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, John, and Matthew did. We must read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it.

There can be no wisdom without understanding.

Our oldest founding father of the Christian Church (DOC) was Thomas Campbell and he had some radical thoughts about how we should study the Bible. His dominate premise was – the individual must read the Bible and judge for himself or herself what it says. For the early 1800's in America and in the world, this was a very radical idea! Thomas Campbell said he would share his thoughts on scripture, but every man or woman must be allowed to judge for himself or herself, as every man or woman must bear his own judgement, every man or woman must give account for himself or herself to God.

Very radical and very much in line with the Parable of the Sower.

A first story today - A father was asked to share his faith story during a Lenten service. He spoke of losing his only son in the war in Afghanistan. His grief was still fresh. He wept as he spoke and the worshipers wept with him. At the close he said this - 'Only the promise of God will get me through this!'

What marks the difference between those who break from faith under pressure and those who hold fast? What makes this father say those words - 'Only the promise of God will get me through this!'? What makes spiritual survivors out of those who endure pain and loss?

I wonder if it is courage or fortitude or both?

Jesus says it is depth of faith. The seeds of the Word of the Kingdom so deeply root themselves in the heart and mind that we follow them even when it is hard. It is the depth of faith that the only promise God gives us is that He will get us through it.

The Word of God is more than a book or a sermon. It is a living and empowering force in the life of a Christian. It is the stubborn little seedling reaching down through the rocks to the depths of hope. It is the Word of a Father who lost His only Son whose promises will get us through.

Story #2 - A preacher delivers a fire-and-brimstone message on the evils of the world. His congregation is very moved and he pointed his finger outside the walls of his church at a fallen culture. He shouted - REPENT because the evil we deplore is out there! At the close of the service he greeted the congregation at the door. He received many compliments on his message. He was told that he had a prophet's passion. One congregational member stayed after the service and stayed seated in the pew. The Pastor approached the man and asked him if he could help him. He told the Pastor this - 'We are the culture, Pastor. Your finger should have been pointing at us as well!'

The thorns of Jesus' parable point to how we have become so ingrained in modern society that we lose the Word of truth. The thorns in the parable point to those who hear the Word but yet become numb to its meaning. We can become so worldly that the Word is lost to us. In other words, we do not hear the Word of the Kingdom and we do not obey it. It is choked out by the culture's claim on our hearts. Our wealth, success, happiness, convenience, and entitlement are based on worldly things - not the Word of truth.

Being cultured is not always a blessing for the Christian. We are called to be different enough to be noticed, to be fruitful, to be salt and light.

Jesus' word and life stood out in His culture. Jesus' word and life were amazing and rich with authority. Can the same be said of our words and life? Can the same be said of our shared ministry?

My third and final story is about a pastoral search committee who listed the qualities they hoped to find in a new pastor. Admittedly the composite list often asks for superhuman heroics and always topping the list is dynamic preaching. It seems to be a reasonable expectation for a new pastor. Most pew setters would like an effective and engaging communicator in the pulpit. They want a person who presents a personal faith with thoughtfulness and moving exposition of God's Word.

In the Parable of the Sower, the final seeds are cast on good soil and those seeds remind us that those who receive the good news of the Gospel have some responsibilities. The hearers of the Word must clear their minds and hearts the way a farmer clears a field of weeds and rocks. The hearers of the Word must pray from understanding and their hearing must go beyond hearing to listening and sharing. They must bring to the Word their trials and hard times. They must fully anticipate that God will have something powerful for them to help them share the Word. Then and perhaps only then, will the hearers of the Word bear much fruit and finish the sermon in their own lives.

The powerful Word of God is enhanced by both dynamic preaching and dynamic listening.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, Word made flesh, may your Word shape the wisdom of our lives.

O God, plant your Word so deep within us that we may persevere in hard times and rejoice in good times.

Lord, may your Word bear fruit in our lives and in your world.

And finally Lord, make all of us who hear the Word become dynamic listeners and sharers of your truth. AMEN.