

Are You Saved?

The Parable of the Soils: Which Are You?

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Introduction

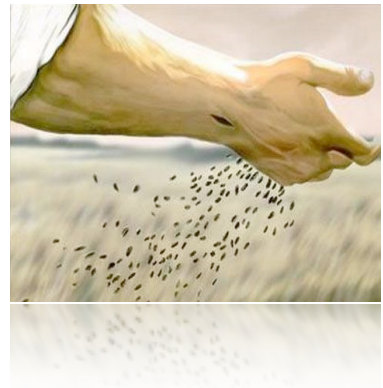
Preliminary Notes:

The parable that the Lord Jesus Christ gives concerning a sower who went out to sow seed is of paramount importance in understanding the saving gospel. The parable is quite radical. In this particular story when Jesus explains the illustration, Jesus gives four different categories of people. Three of these categories of people are lost, unsaved, and have forfeited eternal life. Only one category of people in Jesus' illustration consist of truly regenerate people.

The Text:

Mark 4:1-20 — He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 "Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 "Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 10 ¶ As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12 so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." 13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 "The sower sows the word. 15 "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 "In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Thesis:



The goal of this essay is to explain the meaning of the parable of the soils and Jesus' interpretation of the parable. After the explanation is provided, the study will give clear application, leading questions, and thought-provoking statements that will allow you to examine your own heart, motives, and fruit so as to ascertain whether you are the "good soil".

As for the format of the study, over the next few days, I will look at each of the particular soils individually. So the format will be as follows:

Part 1 - The overview of the parable of the soils

Part 2 - The soil beside the road — "hearers but not doers"

Part 3 - The soil on dry ground — "impulsive but no persevering faith"

Part 4 - The soil among the thorns — "distracted with a lust for the present world"

Part 5 - The soil that bears fruit — "hearers, doers, fruit-bearers and persevering in faith"

Part 1 - The overview of the parable of the soils

Comments:

In the northern part of Israel, Jesus began to teach the crowds again near the Sea of Galilee. In fact, so large was the crowd that Jesus had to get into a boat in the sea to teach the masses on the land by the shore and along the hillside (Mark 4:1). With such an attentive audience, He began to teach many things to the eager hearers. His method of teaching was to instruct by telling earthly stories with heavenly meaning — that is, a parable.

One of the stories that Jesus told on this occasion was so important he commanded his hearers to: "Listen" (Mark 4:3)! Again emphasizing the importance of this particular story he would tell, he said: "Behold" (Mark 4:3), the sower went out to sow. Obviously the hearers on the shore and on the nearby hillside could understand the practical illustration Jesus used. There may have even been a man off in the distance in a field sowing his seed and as Jesus began to tell the story he pointed to the sower and all of his hearers turned their heads and saw the sower casting seed. And as every sower would know, not every seed goes deep into good soil and bears fruit. Some is good; and some is bad. So it was in Jesus' story.

Verse 4 begins by noting that as the sower cast his seed, some fell beside the road and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell off the road and did not sink down into the ground to take root. Rather, it stayed on the surface so the hungry birds could swoop down to eat up the visible seed on the surface of the ground.

Next, Jesus says, beginning in verse 5, other seed fell on the rocky, dry ground where there was no good soil. Immediately the seed sprang up but because it had no depth, when the hot sun rose up, the quickly-sprouted seed was scorched and thus withered away. Everyone in the Mediterranean climate of Israel knew this. In much of the year, the hot, dry sun would beat down upon those working in the fields. They knew that they had to start work early and end before the hotter parts of the day hit. Specifically, Jesus says, this seed immediately sprang up but because of the dry soil and because it had no depth in the soil the sun rose up, scorched the rootless plant, it immediately withered away. It dried up.

Other seed that fell from the sower's hand fell among the thorns (Mark 4:7). The thorns came up and choked the seed and it thus yielded no crop. The thorns choked the seed out so that it could produce no crop.

Jesus then spoke to the eager audience listening to his story and told them about still other seed that fell into good soil. This is the seed that dug deep into the moist soil, it grew up and increased, and it yielded a crop. So fruitful was this seed that over time it produced thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold (Mark 4:8). Commanding all the hearers to pay careful attention to what he said, Jesus concluded the simple illustration by stating: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9).

The followers of Jesus approach Him and ask about the meaning of the stories He told. He said that they have been given the mystery of the kingdom of God but those who are outside receive everything in parables (Mark 4:10-11). In fact, the purpose of this is "so that" while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven (Mark 4:12). Quoting the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, Jesus affirms the sovereignty of God in taking the truth that people hear and penetrating their hearts or not. Jesus declares that it is a sovereign work of God in bringing the truth to light and in keeping others in darkness (Isaiah 6:9).

The Explanation:

Jesus explains the parable to his confused listeners when he tells them that the sower sows the word (Mark 4:14). This clearly shows that Jesus is talking about the Word of God when it goes forth. Just as a sower sows seed on the ground so it is with the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, it falls upon different types of "soils" in people's ears and hearts. The parallel is simple and the story is clear.

There are some people who hear the word as it is "sown" (Mark 4:15a) who hear and then immediately Satan comes and takes away the Word which has been sown in them.

Similarly, there are people on whom the seed of the Word is sown that are parallel to rocky soil who hear the word as it comes to them. They impulsively believe and quickly make a decision or a choice for God. Yet because these have no firm root in themselves — but indeed they are only temporary — they immediately fall away when affliction or persecution befalls them. When any form of hardship comes on the horizon or a form of affliction approaches, these people immediately fall away (Mark 4:16-17).

Still yet, others receive the seed of the word and yet they are preoccupied with worldliness. They hear the Word (Mark 4:18) but the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter into the heart of the hearer and "choke out" the word which was heard. This person has been overcome with an all-consuming mindset on this world. Worries, wealth, and worldliness has warred for preeminence in this person's heart and the Word of God is thus quickly choked out. So then, it becomes unfruitful (Mark 4:19).

Finally, other people who hear the Word are like good soil. They hear the word and accept it. Then they bear fruit based on what they heard. In other words, what they heard changed them. It transformed them. It impacted their lives. So great and noticeable was the work of the Word that this person bore fruit, thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold (Mark 4:20).

No wonder that in a parallel account in Luke's gospel, in this same context and setting, Jesus urged his hearers to "take care *how you listen*" (Luke 8:18).

Conclusion:

One point unmistakably rises to the surface as one carefully reads the story. Each of the "soils" that Jesus describes has one thing in common, they all *hear* the Word of God. These people are those who all hear the Word in a similar way. It comes to them in some way, in some fashion, through some medium.

It might be someone who reads his Bible. Perhaps it refers to a person who listens to sermons and lectures while commuting to work and home from work each day. It may characterize some who have the privilege of hearing sermons throughout the day as they work, travel, or engage in activities with the Word of God piping forth in the background. It could describe some who faithfully attend a Bible-believing, gospel-centered church who hears the truth preached accurately and compellingly each week! Regardless, every person that falls into the story that Jesus tells all, likewise, together *hear the Word of God* as it goes forth.

So now the question remains for those of us who *do hear the Word of God* regularly, what kind of "soil" are you. In other words, what do you *do* with what you have *heard*?

That remains for us to answer tomorrow as we examine Part 2 in our study.

Part 2 - The Soil Beside the Road — "Hearers But Not Doers"



Comments:

In this real life story that Jesus gives to his hearers who crowded the hillside as he taught on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel, he commanded his hearers to listen to his teaching (Mark 4:3). In the illustration, Jesus speaks of a man who sowed seed and some of it fell beside the road. This may have happened as some seed may have dropped out of the pouch as the sower walked through his fields. Others may have been cast out of his hand onto the ground and it fell not on rich, good, fertile soil but next to the road without any root. Luke 8:5 notes that as this seed fell beside the road, it was trampled under foot. And, of course, as these

seeds fell beside the road and lay on the surface of the ground, the birds quickly swooped down and ate the seed up.

The Explanation:

Jesus helpfully takes the time to explain the meaning of his story so that his hearers would properly look at their own lives as to how they “hear the Word.” In providing the interpretation, Jesus says that the seed that falls beside the road and is quickly eaten up by birds is tantamount to those who hear when the Word is sown and immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them (Mark 4:15).

In Matthew 13, the parallel account includes a few other points that are helpful. When someone hears the word (the sown seed) of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart (Matt 13:19). Luke 8:12 clearly identifies these as the “unsaved” since Luke says that these are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart so that they will not believe and be saved.

All hearers of God’s Word must ask themselves this question: *what do I do with what I have heard?* There are those who hear the word preached and who do not “understand” it (Matt 13:19). This is so because the natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him (1 Cor 2:14). The unsaved man cannot understand the deep truths of the gospel because of his depraved nature that affects even his will and understanding. Furthermore, he does not receive the Word and apply it to his life since it is utter foolishness to him. They are not able to abide in God’s Word since they do not belong to God. *But they are still those who hear the Word as it is sown.*

This is someone who hears the Word preached and when he hears it, the devil immediately comes and takes the Word away from their heart so that they do not believe. That is, the devil comes and literally “snatches the Word” away from their hearts (Matt 13:19). How amazing is it to realize that in every setting where the Word of God goes forth, the devil and his minions wait to take the heralded Word and take it out of the hearer so that he will not believe. Of course, this particular hearer is unsaved and is not able even to hear, understand, apply, and fully incorporate the preached Word to his life (Luke 8:12). Nevertheless, how sobering a thought it is that Satan snatches the Word away from the hearts of some hearers. Those that do not hear, respond to, apply, and understand the Word as it is sown are those who fit into this category.

These are hard-hearted hearers but not doers. These people have deceived themselves if they think that their hearing of the Word somehow earns them favor with God. James writes that if someone is a hearer of the Word and *not* a doer of the Word he deludes himself; that is, he is deceived (James 1:22). This idea of being deceived in James 1 is in opposition to “abiding in the Word” (James 1:25). That is, one who does not abide by the Word that goes forth is one who hears the Word and does not do the Word and thus he has deceived himself.

Many faithfully proclaim the Word of God and yet the Word does not dig deep into their hearts. In fact, these people are invaded by Satan himself who takes the Word away which had been sown in their hearts. How does this happen?

Perhaps many hear the Word as it is sown and they outright reject the truth of the gospel. They reject it because it is too radical. Perhaps they refuse to submit to the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ over their entire lives completely. They may not want to leave a pet sin. They may cherish the alluring draw of science and reject the truthfulness of Scripture in all it affirms, says, and declares concerning the omnipotent work of God the Creator and the sovereign work of the Spirit in salvation.

This category may describe many who sit week after week in church and hear the Word as the preacher heralds and yet they leave “wowed” by the sermon, captivated by the speaker’s creativity, and intrigued by a particular nuance. Yet the situation is the same with all of these folks. They go home with no intention of changing their lives. The Word has not impacted their hearts so as to produce conviction, conversion, contrition, and commitment to increase in Christlikeness. They left no different than when they arrived. These are those who sit through sermon after sermon *unchanged*. The Word is *ineffective* to them. They reject it. They refuse to obey it. They take no deliberate action to apply the Word to their own lives. They act not when the Spirit prompts them to repentance and confession. These are those who *hear* the Word but do not *apply* the Word.

I ask you, dear reader, what do you *do* with what you *hear*? Does what you hear every week *affect* your desires, passions, will, words, and life? Is your zeal for God and His preeminent glory ignited afresh in your soul? How do you drop to your knees when you return home after hearing a convicting sermon and beg for God’s tender mercies to forgive you for your faults? Do you? Does the sermon change you? Does it grow you? Has it converted you? Does it cause you to commit yourself to more fervent holiness with greater zeal, ferociousness, tenacity, and intentionality?

Does the gospel change you? Does the theology of the Scriptures entice you to study it more during the week? Do you apply the sermon? When you hear about prayer in a sermon, do you pray more? When you are told in the Word of God to evangelize, do you apply it? When the sermon application reminds you of your complaints, your lack of trust in God, your quick-temper and anger, your pet-idols that you honestly cherish more than God, your fear of man that consumes your thoughts rather than an all-consuming fear of God, how does it change you? Does it?

If what you hear does not affect your heart, mind, will, and life, then it shows you do not understand the Word, the evil has come and snatched away the Word from you, and there is nothing left but unbelief. Conversion is still needed for this person. Change has not happened. The Word has not worked savingly yet for this individual.

With the myriad of opportunities available via media, one can almost listen to good, faithful Bible teaching from the Word of God constantly. Do the sermons and lectures you hear change you? Do they change your walk? Do they change the way you talk? Do they change the way you read your Bible? Do they cause you to commit to better prayer habits? Do they prompt you to love your wife more sacrificially and selflessly? Do they remind you to submit heartfully, tenderly and quietly to your husband? Do they convict you about the way to point your disobedient children to the glory of Christ and the salvation that only He provides in every occasion of discipline? Do

the sermons affect your love for the Father in his predestining of you out of His furious wrath and into His glorious love? Do the sermons you hear give you a greater awe of Jesus who died in the place of sinners bearing the full weight of punishment for His people so that they may receive His perfect righteousness by faith? Do the truths that you hear prompt you to worship the Spirit and rely on Him for His sustaining grace, strength, and filling every single day? How do you hear the Word as it goes forth.

No wonder Jesus said in this same setting: “so take care how you listen” (Luke 8:18).

Conclusion:

May the Lord convict us of the times we *hear* but do not *heed* the Word as it is sown. O may God forgive us for being slothful hearers. How lazy we can be! How ineffective we can be at taking the preached Word and increasing in zeal for it in our hearts, applying it to our hearts, and implementing it to our lives. May we run to the cross of Jesus Christ for an abundance of mercy, grace, and pardon. He quickly forgives the contrite and the penitent. May we resolve in our hearts to listen to each sermon and *apply* and *implement* what we hear. May we refuse to hear the Word and be unaffected by it.

For those who have had a life of hearing the Word and yet the devil has come and taken it away immediately upon the hearing of it, recognize your sin! Recognize your condition! Recognize that you must receive the Word and believe the Word! You must receive the Word, believe the Word and be saved (Luke 8:12)!

Perhaps there are some reading this essay who have sat in church for years — perhaps, decades. Yet there has never seemed to be any real, lasting, heartfelt, joyful change. Perhaps you are trusting in your religious tradition of sitting and hearing the Word preached every week to save your soul from perdition! O be warned of your lost state! Hearing the Word without applying the Word is like looking at yourself in the mirror and seeing the work that needs to be done and yet you take no action! O beware of your condition before Holy God! Every sermon a lost sinner hears without applying it to his life is like adding another log to the fires of eternal hell. How pitiful is the sinner who falls to hell with many sermons in his mind. How sad is this case! And how many people now reside in hell who have heard sermons in church, online, or in schools and yet have refused to believe it and be saved!

May God graciously awaken any who may be likened to those by the road who hear the Word and yet the devil snatches it away so that they do not believe it to be saved. O may those who are hearers of the Word but not doers repent today and find the grace of God ready to pardon and eager to forgive based upon the sole merit of Jesus Christ and His saving and substitutionary work accomplished at Calvary's cross. Repent! Believe! And come to Christ today!

Part 3 - The Soil On Rocky Ground — “Impulsive But No Persevering Faith”



Introduction:

In the public ministry of our Lord, he spend much time in the northern region of Israel teaching the masses and preaching the saving gospel of repentance & faith. A large crowd has gathered around him in the northern precincts of the Sea of Galilee and because of the enormity of the crowd he had to get into a boat and teach there. The people gathered on the sea shore and on the hillsides nearby. There very well may have been a man sowing seed in a field nearby as a practical real-life illustration of Jesus' teaching.

Remarkably, Jesus brings all of his hearers into his story as they all stand listening to the “Word” as He sows it to them. Just as a sower scatters the seed, so in Jesus' story, the seed is the going forth of the Word of God. Thus, none of Jesus' hearers can escape. They all play a part in his story; they all are hearers.

Some of his hearers are those who have heard the Word as it was sown and yet it fell beside the road. That is, it did not sink deep into their hearts. And, just as birds would come and devour the seed that fell beside the road, so Satan has likewise come and snatched away the Word of God so that they do not understand what they have heard so as to believe and be saved. They heard the truth but it did not profit them because they did not mix it with faith.

The Explanation:

In His story, Jesus then speaks about the sower who cast his seed as he was sowing. Some of the seed fell on the road and was quickly devoured. But other seed fell on the rocky places where it did not have much soil (Mark 4:5). The seed came to the ground, went into the ground, and it even quickly sprang up but it did not have any depth of soil. But when the hot sun scorched, that every inhabitant of Israel would have known all too well, the seed that quickly sprouted was scorched and it withered away because it had no deep root (Mark 4:6). This kind of seed that was scattered down to the ground quickly sprouted up but yet because of the dry, rocky, unhealthy soil it only sprouted for a brief time since, when the sun rose, the little sprout was scorched, dried up, and immediately withered. In fact, this seed that was scattered fell in such a place that it had no moisture (Luke 8:6). And, of course, in a hot and dry climate such as Israel, everyone knew how important it was for the ground to receive moisture. But these seeds that went into the dry, cracked, rocky ground would not last long because it had no depth of good soil nor any necessary moisture.

Undoubtedly every hearer would have been nodding in agreement because they know the blazing-hot sun that scorches down in the afternoons in Israel. They knew this to be true. This

was a real life, understandable, common story that Jesus told with which everyone could identify.

In the same setting and context, just a little later on, Jesus explains what He means by this particular part of the story. The sower who sows seed in Jesus's story is akin to the Word of God as it is sent forth and heard by people. Some are those who are beside the road when the Word is sown and they hear and it takes no root in them and thus Satan takes the Word away.

But in a similar way, there are those on whom the seed was sown on the rocky places who hear the Word of God as it is preached. They hear the Word and immediately receive it with joy (Mark 4:16). They have, however, no firm root in themselves but they are only temporary. The joy is temporary, shallow, feeble, and unsubstantial. In fact, these people who hear the Word are those who immediately fall away when affliction or persecution arises because of the Word (Mark 4:17). Luke adds that these people who hear the Word that was sown are those who "believe for a while" and then fall away in times of temptation (Luke 7:13). Putting the accounts together, it becomes evident that the people in this "group" in Jesus' story are those who hear the Word and they receive it and even respond well for a brief time. In fact, they even respond with joy and even with a temporary "believing". In many ways, these people would give cause for rejoicing in any church or ministry because of the seeming effect the proclaimed gospel had on their hearts and lives.

A phrase seems to mark this particular group. They hear the Word, they seem to receive the Word. They appear to believe the Word. Yet they have no firm root "in themselves." It appears that these people are isolated, not plugged in, attempting to be lone-rangers, and those who do not actively engage in the ministry of the Lord and of His Church for whatever reason. These people have no root "in themselves" (Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17). Danger looms on the horizon when those who follow God are left alone — "in themselves."

Jesus further elaborates on what characterizes this type of group that hears His Word. These are only temporary. That is, these are passing, transitory, staying for only a brief time. These may be compared to people who come hear the Word of God as it is taught and preached for a season, for a period, for a prolonged period, perhaps, but then after a while they depart to isolation. Luke says that these people even "believe for a season" (Luke 8:13). There is a temporary belief, a shallow faith, a non-enduring and non-lasting trust.

Why is it that these depart after a season? Why do they leave the place where they can be fed from the Word of God? Why do they abandon the church of God where they can hear the Word of God? Jesus gives a number of possibilities.

First, affliction may drive them away. Because of tribulation that comes upon these particular people who hear the Word, they refuse to remain with the Lord (Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17). Perhaps this person believed in the Word as it fell upon their ears and heart yet because of hardship in life, they fell away from Christ. Maybe they assumed that faith in Jesus Christ might eliminate hardship, sickness, sorrow, and sadness. Could it be that this category of hearers find *more* affliction after believing than they did prior to believing? Maybe they found that hardship abounded. Maybe they could withstand the affliction no longer.

It is this group that forgets that comfort in the midst of affliction comes from finding continuous revival and strength in the Word of God (Ps 119:50). God never despises the affliction of the afflicted one (Ps 22:24). In fact, God sees the affliction of His people and he gives grace to those in need (Ps 31:7-9). These people fail to remember the words of Jesus Christ that “in this world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). So then, this group falls away and refuses to persevere in their faith in Christ because of affliction and hardship.

Second, persecution because of the Word may drive them away. It appears that this group of people believe for only a short time because when opposition comes upon them because of the Word of God, they refuse to stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might (Mark 4:17). Could it be that they love the approval of men more than the approval of God? And when others mock, jeer, make fun of, reject, slander, ignore, and treat cruelly, this particular group of hearers of God’s Word do not stand for Truth. Rather, they give in and give up on their faith. Thus, they have a temporary faith because the trouble of persecution seems too tumultuous to bear.

Jesus said that the world hated him and so it would also hate those who are His (John 15:18). Those who are *of* the world are loved *by* the world. But those whom God has called *out of* the world are those who receive hatred from the world (John 15:19). There are those who believe what they hear from the lips of preachers *till* hardship comes, *till* they have to stand for Christ and face opposition and mockings. Paul says that all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus *will* be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12). The early church was strengthened, confirmed, and characterized by persecution that came upon them because of the Word (cf. Acts 11:19). It may be that when a person hears the Word of God, he receives it, believes in it, rejoices in it but yet cannot stand the possibility of being rejected by family for believing in Jesus Christ. Or, perhaps, this person squirms at the potentiality of being excluded from the social group and being treated as an outcast. This person is a friend of the world and desires the approval of men more than the approval of God.

Third, temptations may lure them away. When a season of temptation knocks at the heart and mind of this person who hears the Word, the temptation to sin wins and the person then falls away from the Lord (Luke 8:13). This person does not resist when temptation knocks. He does not find the way of escape that God promises to provide in every single temptation (1 Cor 10:13). This person who has heard the Word and impulsively responded to the Word has, perhaps, not been on the watch for the wily schemes of Satan who looks to deceive. Sin crouches at the door and God’s people must be on the lookout for and always be ready to wage war against temptation (Gen 4:7).

Every Christian is able to “endure” the temptation with the strength, help, and enabling grace of the Lord (1 Cor 10:13). The Lord even knows how to rescue the godly from temptation (2 Pet 2:9). God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13). But when a person is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (James 1:14). If deliberate, intentional, sin-killing action is not taken quickly, swiftly, and effectively when lust is conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is accomplished brings forth death (James 1:15).

This person who heard the Word as it was sown believed for a time. He rejoiced for a time. He had a faith for a time. He remained for a time. He lingered around Christ and His Church for a season. But when the time of temptation to sin crashed into his Christian life, he fell prey to the temptation, gave in, gave up, and never returned to the Lord.

One more thought cannot be missed. Jesus said that those who hear the Word in this particular group are those who immediately receive the Word with joy! O imagine the *outward appearance* of genuine faith! These particular people who hear the Word as it goes forth rejoice in its truth. They seemingly enjoy the glory of the gospel. They live in the light of its splendor. At least, for a season. Never forget that true faith is a triumphant faith. A real faith is a remaining faith. A saving faith is a persevering faith. Faith that does not persevere is an invalid faith, an unsaving faith, a false faith, a dead faith.

Remember the words of our Lord in a different context in His ministry: “you will be hated by all because of my Name *but the one who endures to the end will be saved*” (Mark 13:13; Matt 24:13). The Apostle Paul told his protege Timothy to persevere in the things of the Word so as to ensure salvation for his own soul (1 Tim 4:16). A believer is one who “perseveres in tribulation” (Rom 12:12).

Consider the relevance of our Lord’s teaching! O beware of falling away! Dear hearer of the Word of God, don’t fall away from the Lord and from His Word! Have you once believed? Did you respond impulsively? Did you have a joy at first but have long since fallen away? Did the hardship of life drive you away from God because you might have had a faulty understanding of trials, tribulations, and hardships in this life. The journey to heaven is nothing less than battle, war, struggle, a fight. Eternal bliss happens in heaven. Eternal peace apart from all trouble dawns only at the moment of death for a believer. But till then, God says that hardship will face the believer.

Do you have a persevering faith? Are you persecuted for the Word? Do others reject you? Have others mocked you? Do you feel excluded from the social group you once hung around with? Do temptations drive you away from God? Do you constantly seem to fall prey to temptation? Do you fall into the temptation of wanting (=lusting) to get rich? Do you fall into the temptation of sexual lust? Do you fall into the temptation of comparing your spouse to other men or women that you see, hear about, read about, or view? Do you fall into the temptation of gossip? Do you fall into the temptation of complaining and thus expressing dissatisfaction with God and His Sovereign plan for your life at this time? Do you still believe? Do you stand strong? Do you remain, abide, persevere, continue with Christ? Believe, and keep on believing! Never stop believing!

If you once believed and have long since left, repent of your sin and come back to Jesus Christ. For only in Him can one find life, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and expiation from all of sin’s penalty. Did you once respond impulsively to an altar call? Did you once pray a prayer? Did you ever ask Jesus “into your heart?” Did you ever walk the aisle and go to the front of the church to “get saved?” If so, hear the Word of the Lord. An impulsive faith saves no one. A short, temporary, non-enduring, shallow faith that falls away brings *no* salvation. None! If this is you, O

reader, then fall before the cross of Jesus Christ in repentance. Cling to Him as the Rock of your salvation. Beg Him for His grace to save you and His strength to help you as you abide in Him. Truly everyone who is saved is someone who continues to believe, stand with, and persevere in his faith.

Conclusion:

Cling to the strength of the Lord. Find rest in Him and in Him alone. No person who hears the Word can stand *in his own strength*. Every person will fail and fall miserably if left to his own human devices and feeble strength to persevere in the faith. No one would ever make it to the shores of heaven if it depended on us. But with the strength of the Lord, by the grace of God, with the enabling power of God the Spirit, every true Christian believes, remains, abides, and perseveres in faith till the end. That is why some have seen this as the biblical teaching of the perseverance of the saints. All true saints will persevere. Yet this is completely impossible without the preserving grace of God. And, of course, God promises to perfect, complete, and establish His people secure until the end (1 Pet 5:10; 1 Thess 3:13).

May God glorify His own Name to grant you an enduring faith. May God be pleased to sustain His people with a triumphant faith — for His own renown and His own glory! May God strengthen you, equip you, establish you, and guard you as you persevere in believing until the day you awake and see His own likeness and glory in heaven.

Part 4 - The Soil Among the Thorns — “Distracted With a Lust for the Present World”

Introduction:

Jesus is the master teacher. His illustrations are rich, picturesque, understandable, and undeniably clear. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (called the “*synoptics*” from Greek two words that mean ‘seeing together’) all provide a particular discourse that Jesus gave in northern Israel while sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee while the masses stood before him on the shore and on the surrounding hillside. Many heard this teaching. His hearers were gripped by the illustration and the spiritual meaning of this parable.

In the story, Jesus spoke of a man who went out to sow seed and some of the scattered seed fell beside the road where the birds quickly swooped down and ate it up. Other seed came upon rocky ground where it did not have much soil. It did, however, spring up quickly but because it had no moisture and no depth of soil, when the sun rose up it scorched the little sprout and it immediately withered away.



Jesus then mentions other seed that fell among the thorns and the thorns came up and choked the scattered seed and the little sprouts that arose and thus it yielded no crop.

Explanation:

Jesus has taken the time to explain the meaning of his story to his hearers. He told them that the sower who sows seed is akin to the person who sends forth the Word of God upon the ground of people's hearts. There are many kinds of hearers of God's Word. Some are like the seed that fell beside the road where the birds came and took the seed away since they hear the Word but it does not affect them at all. Satan comes and snatches the Word away from them so that they do not understand, apply, and believe what they've heard to be saved. Still others, Jesus likens to the seed that falls on rocky places who hear the Word and immediately, impulsively, and visibly receive it with joy. Yet they have no firm root; they are temporary. When hardship, persecution because of the Word and their new-found faith arises, they fall away and thus show themselves to be unsaved because true faith is a persevering faith.

Now Jesus transitions to a third category of people who hear the Word of God. In the story, which of course everyone could relate to in the familiar agrarian way of life in Galilee, Jesus speaks of some scattered seed which falls to the ground but the thorns come up, choke it, and the seed which sprouted yields no crop at all.

When Jesus was asked what this story meant, He provided the explanation. There are people who hear the Word which was sown but the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word (Mark 4:18-19). Thus, it becomes unfruitful and withers away (Mark 4:19). Luke notes that the thorns grew up *with* the seed that fell to the ground and eventually choked it out (Luke 8:7). It appears that Jesus here speaks of the person who hears the Word as it is "scattered" and they appropriate the Word to their hearts and lives for a season since Jesus says "as they go on their way" (Luke 8:14). But this kind of person endeavors to live a double-life. This person wants to enjoy the religiousness of hearing the Word of God and *living with* the Word of God while at the same time clinging to the worries of this world, the riches of this life, and the pleasures of the flesh. Sadly, this person cannot remain true to Christ while adhering to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life and so, as Jesus Himself clearly states, they "bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14) and thus show themselves to be unsaved.

To understand this kind of "hearer" of the Word, a number of points characterize this person:

First, the worries of the world choke out the Word of God. Jesus says that one of the thorns that can choke out the Word of God from the heart of a hearer of divine truth is the all consuming nature of the worries of this world. Worry kills trust. Worry disregards faith. Worry slaughters assurance. Many are those who hear the Word as the preacher faithfully imparts the truth of Scripture and yet they find themselves overwhelmingly intertwined with the consuming, unending, threatening, and dominating worries of this age. Anxiety plagues many people. So widespread is anxiety that many modern-day psychotropic drugs are prescribed to help those in such situations. Anxiety and worry is not a disorder, it's a sin. Psychotropic drugs

cannot solve the real, ultimate problem of worry and anxiety. It cannot bring the solution. Indeed, it cannot for it only superficially reaches a temporary result. Drugs cannot get to the heart. However, the Word of God can!

The person who finds himself plagued with worry and anxiety must remember the gracious, loving, and strong help that is available to him in the Word of God, by the power of the Spirit, and through fervent, frequent, undying prayer. Jesus Himself commanded His followers: “do not worry” (Matt 6:31). Later he said: “do not worry for each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34). God’s people must not worry about their lives (Luke 12:22). God says in the Word of God that all believers must “be anxious for nothing” (Phil 4:6). The solution to a life of worry, anxiety and fear is a complete replacement with new habits that need to be formed that includes prayer, supplication, thanksgiving and letting requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6). So powerful is this exchange of putting off worry, fear, and anxiety and replacing it with a heartfelt trust and a frequent life of prayer that the peace of God will guard the hearts of God’s people when they appropriate this (Phil 4:7).

But sadly, as the case can be for many, they hear the Word as it is sown and yet the worries of the world, the tumultuous troubles, and the overwhelming anxieties choke out the Word and they become unfruitful, unfaithful, and thus evidence themselves over time to be unsaved.

What causes you to worry? What plagues you? What do you do with your fears? How do you cope when worrisome situations attack you? When the large army of fear comes knocking at your heart’s fortress, what do you do? Who do you run to? Where do you turn? Is your solution in medication? Or do you find yourself overcome, conquered, defeated, enslaved to, and inextricably linked to your worry? Do finances plague you? Does the next mortgage worry you? Do your children keep you up at night as you worry about them and fear for their future? Have you ever noted that worry at its root is self-worship because worry is a lack of trust in God and an attempt to trust in self.

Second, the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word of God. Money can be deceptive. If one sets his heart upon it he is unwise as it can quickly take up the wings of a bird and fly away never to be seen, felt, and deposited again (Prov 23:5). If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them (Ps 62:10). The lust for money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). Riches can deceive the hearts of people as they may truly believe that the more money they have, the better their life will be. The more hours you work and the larger that the paycheck is, the happier you and your family will be. After all, as some over-worked and ever-too-busy husbands say, “I must provide for my wife & family and give them what they want, right?” Wrong.

Riches cannot bring happiness. Riches can be a blessing to a person who has a proper perspective on heavenly things and knows that God owns *all* riches anyway. But this is not the norm. Many believe that riches equals happiness. Success in work means success in life. Lots of money to bring home must mean lots of happiness in the home. But these common ways of thinking are erroneous, wrong, unbiblical, and devastating.

There is a deceptiveness about money that the Bible warns against repeatedly. King Solomon fell prey to this when he hoarded up money and then walked away from God for most of his adult

life (1 Kings 11; Eccl 5). Everything in life is from God (Rom 11:36) and everything belongs to Him anyway. Nothing is ever really *ours*. To seek happiness in riches means to forfeit true and lasting happiness in Christ. After all, no one can serve to masters, no one can serve *both* God and money (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13).

Why do you work? What do you do with God's money that you bring home each pay period? If you showed your recent credit card statement, bank statement, and all the credit cards you have with your name on them, what would that reveal about *your attitude toward* God's money that He entrusts to you? Do you lust for more? Why? Are you unhappy with what God has graciously given to you? A relentless lust and a persistent passion for more money for bigger, better, more comfortable things reveals a god in your heart called greed. Find the greed in your heart, seek the Lord's face, humbly beg for His grace and forgiveness and plead by His strength and power to shun the dominating and deceitful passion for more riches.

Third, the desires and lusts for material things and pleasures choke out the Word of God. Jesus notes something that is common to every single human being who has ever lived. Everyone has desires, cravings, passions, "lusts". There are some who hear the Word of God as it is taught and proclaimed and yet they find themselves having "desires" or "lusts" or "strong wishes for" material things — or, as it could be rendered: "the rest of the things." Coveting for more is the craving of this person's soul. The greediness for more goods becomes the god of this person's life. The false notion that more stuff (the "rest") will bring delight, fulfillment, happiness, joy, contentment, and a better life destroys many just as it has destroyed many through the ages. The word Jesus uses is the idea of a strong desire that can easily become a consuming desire. The New Testament often uses the word to identify sexual lust.

One of the judgments of God is when He gives people over to the "lusts of their hearts" (Rom 1:24). A born-again Christian is one who is called by God to not let sin reign in his mortal body in order to obey its *lusts* (Rom 6:12). A true Christian is taught by God to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the *lust* of the flesh (Rom 13:14). If a person truly is saved is walking by the Spirit, he will never fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16). Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh along with its passions and *lusts* (Gal 5:24). When a person is lured away by his own *lust* and he is tempted and gives into sin (James 1:14).

What do you lust for? What can you *not* live without? What would you be hopeless without if it were taken away from you? What would make you so elated and happy if it were given to you? What are you working for? Longing for? Saving up for? What pleasures to you give into repeatedly? Does the lust for more sexual lust lure you away frequently? Does pornography exist at the top of your pursuits? Do you crave for more excitement? More stuff? More pleasure? More things that this world can offer you? Remember, if you were meant to receive true, happy, eternal pleasures here, then this would be your heaven. But this world cannot satisfy and the things of this world only leave empty. Jesus Christ alone satisfies. That is why heaven is so sweet and the certainty of being *with* Jesus Christ forever is the sweetest song to the Christian's soul!

Jesus so clearly says that a person cannot live with an ongoing, unrestrained, warless life giving in to the lusts for more "things". This person who hears the Word and yet gives himself to wanton

pleasures, ongoing greediness, and a life of coveting proves himself to be unfruitful and thus unsaved. For how could he bear fruit when he is constantly following the impulses of his mind, heart, and eyes and giving into his passions, cravings, and lusts to bring him happiness. Only Jesus Christ can satisfy sufficiency, joyfully, and eternally.

Fourth, the neglect to diligently appropriate the killing of sin chokes out the Word of God. Another description of this kind of person who hears the Word as it is sown is the person who hears and *as he goes on his way* he is choked with the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life. In other words, the point that Jesus emphasizes here in this wording is that the person *lives life* with both remaining sin and the desire to walk with God. But it doesn't work; indeed, it cannot work. This person hears the Word regularly and then lives life without any spiritual zeal, without any pursuit of holiness, without an intentional and aggressive passion for Christlikeness. In essence, this person goes to Church, hears the Word, and then lives life without any true, lasting, ongoing, sanctified change. Where there is no change, there is no growth. Where there is no Christlike growth there is no godly fruitbearing. Where there is no godly fruitbearing there is no salvation.

What a shocking phrase to hear Jesus describe this "hearer" as one who *goes through his 'religious' life* while intermingling that with a constant life of worries, riches, and pleasures of this world. They cannot coexist. Walking in the Spirit is different from gratifying the desires of the flesh. They are both mutually exclusive. There is no joining them together in life. They cannot hold hands.

Conclusion:

This teaching of Jesus must have shaken his hearers! O how they must have stopped and examined their own hearts! How have they *heard* the teaching of Christ — the very Word of God itself? And the same question demands our answer as well. How do you hear the Word as it is sown? Are you like the seed that falls to the ground yet it is sown among thorns that soon choke out the preached Word? Does anxiety characterize you? Does a life of ongoing, persistent, consuming worry control your life? Are you frazzled daily because the worries of this world are chained to your heart, mind, and soul? Do you passionately desire more riches? Does a craving for more goods drive your tireless hours on the job so as to receive overtime and greater wages? Do you desire more money in the hopes that money will brighten your life as you live more luxuriously, comfortably, materially, prominently and prestigiously? What characterizes your greatest desires? What do you long for the most in life? What are your foremost passions in life? What do you live for?

O guard your heart, dear reader! O examine your soul, dear reader! O test yourself and the way that you hear the Word of God as it comes into your ears and see whether you are in the faith! If you are characterized by frightening fear and incessant worry, if left unchecked it will choke out the Word of God sown in you. If you passionately crave riches, honor, prestige, luxury, goods, possessions, and 'stuff', be warned — O be not deceived! — that you *cannot* serve both God and money. It is utterly an impossibility for you to worship, live for, lust after, and crave for both the one true God and the pursuit and pleasure of wealth. Nothing more surely reveals where your heart really is than an honest examination of your attitude toward money. Nothing

is more outwardly meaningless, more eternally insignificant, and more inwardly revealing the state of your heart than money itself.

May the grace of God work in your heart so that the Word that you hear affects your life! Do not be a hearer but not a doer. Do not be deceived! A distracted person with a lust for the present world who remains in that state of worldliness will soon find that the Word of God which he has heard is choked out of his heart, his mind, his life, and his soul. May you see your condition if this describes you! May you run in repentance to the Redeemer Himself for grace, mercy and pardon! May you find that the Savior is eternally rich in saving love for those whom He has elected! See your peril and flee to Christ! See the vanity of worldliness and fly to Christ without looking back! Linger no longer and look to the LORD! Procrastinate no more and pursue the kindness of God revealed in Christ as He received the crushing and eternal blows of sin's penalty as the Father slaughtered Him and crushed Him on Calvary's cross. See the crucified One, the risen One, the Conquering One and the sovereign Savior and find life, joy, satisfaction and true pleasure *only* in Him.

Part 5 - The Soil That Bears Fruit — “Hearers, Doers, Fruit-Bearers, and Persevering in Faith”



Introduction:

Jesus has gripped his hearers as He tells them a real-life story that they can all relate to. In fact, Jesus has utterly cornered His hearers. None can escape this story. The point of the story is to show how a true believer *hears* and *responds* to the Word of God. Every single hearer that Jesus speaks to must therefore ask and honestly answer the question of how he *hears* the Word that Jesus sows.

Masses have crowded around Jesus. In fact, so many people have gathered that He had to get into a boat and preach from the Sea of Galilee because the crowds congregated on the shore and on the nearby hills of northern Israel (Mark 4:1). Having such a large audience, Jesus began to teach them spiritual truth with a common to life, everyday illustration about a farmer who cast his seed to the ground in hopes of producing healthy crops.

Jesus notes that the sower who sowed seed is likened to the Word of God which goes forth. There are three groups of hearers that Jesus has spoken of already.

First, those who hear the Word and yet immediately forget what they heard are those who are unbelieving, unsaved, and fruitless.

Second, there are some who hear the Word and immediately receive with joy. Yet because they have no firm root in good ground they fall away when persecution or hardship befalls them because of the Word. They are temporary. They are not lasting, not healthy, not prosperous, not living. They also are unsaved and fruitless.

A third group that Jesus speaks of hears the Word of God and yet the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lustful cravings for other things enter in and choke the Word as it is sown just as the seed that is sown can be choked by the thorns which come up near it.

In His story, Jesus concludes with a final category of people who respond to the *hearing* of the Word.

Explanation:

As the sower sowed his seed, many seeds fell to the ground and for a host of reasons did not produce a good, healthy, prosperous crop and thus proved to be useless. However, there are other seeds that fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold (Mark 4:8).

When those who followed Jesus asked Him to explain what He meant by this portion of the story, He said that the seed that fell on good soil are akin to the people who hear the Word and accept it and bear fruit — thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold (Mark 4:19). Matthew adds that this person not only hears the Word but he understands it (Matt 13:23). Luke provides other truths about these hearers. These hear the Word in an honest and good heart and they hold it fast and thus bear fruit with perseverance (Luke 8:15).

All of Jesus' hearers would have certainly understood that *this* seed that fell on the good soil is the *only* kind of seed that lasts, bears fruit, and produces good crops. The differentiation between this seed that fell to the good soil and the other three seeds which produced *no good crop* is unmistakably clear. Everyone would have affirmed this. No farmer would want a seed that falls by the road where the birds immediately swoop down to devour. No farmer would want seed to fall to the soil with an initial, partial sprout that immediately withers and dies when the sun rises and scorches it. No farmer would desire seed to fall where the thornbushes are where the sprouting plants would be choked to death by the thorns that are intertwined with it. This would be completely unproductive, worthless, and ineffective in producing any good crops.

Every person who hears the Word of God must ask and answer this question honestly: what do I do with what I have *heard*? What is it that characterizes the *good hearers* of the Word of God? How does a person know if he is saved? What characterizes the saved person who hears the Word of God?

A number of essential facts describe the good hearers of God's Word.

First, a saved person hears the Word and receives the Word. Jesus first shows that a person who hears the Word (just as all the other kinds of people) will also receive it. The idea is to "welcome" something (cf. Acts 15:4). It can even speak of "entertaining" in the sense of

giving thought to, giving credence to (1 Tim 5:19). This kind of person hears the Word of God and receives it as if he were receiving a welcomed guest into his home. He would eagerly anticipate the visitor's arrival, spend time with him, talk with him, care for him, and dialogue with him. How this kind of hearer does the same with the Word of God as it is preached into his ears! Also, this hearer is one who gives careful thought, attention, and entertaining thoughts to what he hears. This is the antithesis of hearing the Word and immediately forgetting the Word. This is not those who hear the Word but fail to be doers of the Word! Like a host who looks out the window and eagerly awaits the arrival of an expected visitor, so this kind of hearer of the Word eagerly looks forward to the coming and arrival of the Word as it is preached so he can entertain the Word, receive the Word, dialogue with the Word, apply the Word, implement the Word, and be changed by the Word!

Second, a saved person bears fruit with what he has heard from the Word. An essential mark characterizing every Christian is that of fruitbearing. No Christian lacks godly fruitbearing. Every non-Christian produces no Christ-honoring fruit. Jesus describes those who hear His Word and rightly respond to it as those who bear fruit. Every single Christian has died to the law through the body of Christ so that he may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead *in order to bear fruit* for God (Rom 7:4). Those who receive the gospel bear fruit and grow (Col 1:6). In order to walk in a way that is pleasing to Jesus Christ — that is, to be fully pleasing to Him — a believer must bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God which proved to be Paul's prayer for the Church in Colossae (Col 1:10).

Never does the Bible set, however, a standard that every single Christian has to “attain” in order to be accepted before God. Jesus Christ did this when He obeyed the Father perfectly and died as a substitute for sinners who deserve eternal hell. He attained life for them. He bore hell for them. However, when a person believes in Jesus Christ, spiritual growth comes in different forms, in different degrees, and at different paces. Jesus makes this clear when he says that some will bear fruit to thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. Not everyone will grow and produce a hundredfold. Some will and others may not. However, the point is the same: *every single Christian will most certainly bear fruit for Jesus Christ.*

Bearing fruit is an essential mark of every Christian. A fruitless person is an unsaved person. A person who professes faith in Jesus Christ who neglects spiritual fruit is deceived and does not possess eternal life. The Bible sweepingly makes this clear. John the Baptist arises and preaches: “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8). In fact, John the Baptist said that those who do not bear fruit are those (regardless of their profession!) who will be cut down and thrown into the fire to be eternally burned. (And he was speaking to the most religious people of the day!) Jesus Himself preached and, speaking of determining true believers or not, said that every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt 7:19). Jesus said that every branch that does not bear fruit is taken away, cast into the fire, and it is burned (John 15:2, 6). Every true, on the other hand, that bears good fruit is pruned by God (pruning is by cutting and cutting is often painful [trials]) so as to produce more fruit (John 15:2). Most clearly, Jesus said that the Father is glorified when His followers bear much fruit and thus *prove* to be Jesus' disciples (John 15:8). Jesus sovereignly elected His people and appointed them to go and bear much fruit (John 15:16). Thus it is undeniably clear that every single Christian will bear fruit by abiding in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God, evidencing the work of the Spirit.

Third, a saved person understands the Word as it is sown and strives to implement what he has heard. A person who honors God with what he hears is one who is able to *understand* what he hears. This is more than a simple cognitive and intellectual understanding — although that is involved. A person devoid of the Spirit of God cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him (1 Cor 2:14). Those who do not belong to Jesus Christ *cannot* — they are not able (note the ‘inability’) — understand the things of Christ (John 8:43). No one can rightly understand God if left to his own fallen, depraved state (Rom 3:11). It is only those who have been sovereignly saved by God’s grace who have the Spirit and who can thus rightly understand the Word of God (1 Cor 2:10-16). The person who *hears* the Word and understands it shows that he is one who has the Spirit of God living within him. He thus has the capability to know the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) and apply what he has heard in the truth of Scripture to his own heart, mind and life.

Not only does Jesus refer to mere intellectual understanding but he also speaks of understanding His truth *with the intention* of implementing what he has heard. An unsaved person cannot please God (Rom 8:8) and they cannot obey God for their mind is hostile to God (Rom 8:7). But the person who has been regenerated by sovereign work of God the Spirit is one who *can* understand the truth and he *can* apply and implement that truth to his life. Not only can he, he must! Jesus characterizes the good hearer of His Word as the person who hears the Word and understands it.

Just as Jesus opened the minds of his followers to *understand* the Scriptures as he spoke with them after he rose from the dead (Luke 24:45), so it is with the believer. He can hear and he does understand the truth of Scripture and he has the ability to mentally comprehend and practically implement what he has heard to his life so as to bring about greater sanctification.

Fourth, a saved person hears the Word with an honest and a good heart. A true child of God hears the Word and comes with an honest, noble, good, welcoming heart ready to receive the truth of God. This kind of hearer hates pride and strives to kill pride when the Word of God is delivered. When the Word is sown, the believer does not close his ears to the truth; he does not permit distractions that attempt to dissuade him; he does not “tune out” because he has heard that sermon before or a sermon on that text before.

This person hears the Word with his inward being — his heart. What he hears in his ears goes beyond his ears to the very heart of his heart. The proclaimed Word is received with open arms, with a welcome embrace, with a humble spirit, with an insatiable craving, with a Spirit-empowered diligence to be convicted, changed, and conformed more to the character of Christ!

Fifth, a saved person holds fast to the Word which he has heard. Jesus further describes the saved hearer of divine truth as one who holds fast to what he hears. This unquestionably speaks of a person actively, intentionally, zealously, and frequently clinging to the truth of Scripture to guide him through all his days and all seasons of life. This word describes the pre-converted state of the person who was *held captive, or bound, or enslaved* to the penalty of the Law (Rom 7:6). This person holds on to the Word of God as one who is enslaved to, bound to, chained to its precious truth. Paul so clearly says that a person is saved *if he holds fast*

to the word he preached to them (1 Cor 15:2). Believers are to *hold fast* to that which is good (1 Thess 5:21). Believers must endure and *hold fast* their confession and hope (Heb 3:6). The author of Hebrews most explicitly says that we share in Christ if we *hold fast* our original confidence firm until the end (Heb 3:14; 10:23).

Those who hear the Word that is sown among them are those who hold it fast, they cling to it, they bathe in it, they chew on it, they cannot get enough of it. This kind of person loves the Word. He cannot get sick of the Word. He does not get bored with the precious truth of Scripture. He can hear the Word taught, preached, read, expounded, and applied all day long!

A true child of God most certainly holds fast to the Word of God.

Sixth, a saved person perseveres in the Word which he has heard. Jesus provides one more characteristic of those who rightly hear and rightly respond to His Word. This person hears the Word, clings to the Word and *perseveres* in it. The meaning of the word for perseverance in this context has to do with one who *endures* regardless of the hardships, afflictions, worries, and temptations that crash upon him (Luke 8:15; cf. the context of 8:13-14). A person who is truly converted will abide with Christ till the end. None whom Christ saves fall away. Ever! None whom the Savior secured can ever forfeit his own salvation by his own falling away. If a person does not endure, persevere, and remain with Christ, then by his own falling away he shows that he never genuinely possessed true saving faith to begin with (1 John 2:19). This is so because Jesus said he who endures to the end will be saved (Matt 24:13). A true Christian is a persevering Christian.

No matter the hardship that haunts, no matter the plagues that pound, no matter the waves that beat and batter and bruise, no matter the confusion and opposition that attacks, a true child of God is one who perseveres *because* he is clinging to the Word of God and the God of the Word. Moreover, it is not *his* grip on God that secures Him but rather the omnipotent, eternally-faithful grip of God that holds him. The regenerate person who hears the Word of God and rightly responds to it is the one who perseveres in the faith because God *preserves* his faith. The one who does not persevere shows that God never gave him a faith. A child of God endures.

Jesus says that the person who hears the word with an honest and a good heart is the one who holds it fast and he bears fruit. And the phrase that further defines *how* he bears fruit is that he does it *with perseverance*. So this hearer is one who *continually bears fruit* even while persevering in hardships. He *continually bears fruit* while enduring hardship in life. He *continually bears fruit* even when tempted, tried, troubled, and facing tribulations. A saved person who hears the Word of God and responds rightly is one who clings to the Word and bears fruit while abiding in the Word as he *perseveres* in the Word.

Conclusion:

The question demands your response: what do you *do* with what you *hear*? Does the Word affect you? Change you? Convict you? Conform you? Transform you? Sanctify you? Do you hear the Word and respond to it by receiving it — welcoming it as you would welcome an expectant

visitor — and bearing fruit? Do you understand the Word by the power and ability of the Spirit of God? Every saint has the Spirit and can understand holy Scripture! Do you hear and listen to and welcome the Word of God with a good, honest, and humble heart? Do you hold fast to the Word? Has the Word so gripped you that you grip it every day of your life? Do you persevere in the truth? Do you endure in the Word even amidst the world's waves and the storms of this age? Do you endure? Have you endured? Are you enduring?

O dear reader, he who has an ear to hear, let him hear! O take care how you listen! O beware of hearing the truth of Scripture and rejecting it! Beware of laziness! Beware of religious hypocrisy! Beware of hard-heartedness! Beware of impulsive responses that do not persevere! Beware of troubled, worried, lustful pursuits of this age that choke out the truth of the gospel! Hearing the truth does not save you! Going to church does not save you! Being a member of a church does not save you! Knowing the content of the gospel does not save you! Engaging in ministry does not save you! Only Jesus Christ saves you and those whom He saves are those who hear His Word, bear fruit as they abide in His Word, persevere in His Word, and cling to His Word! Do you?

Conclusion

Concluding Exhortations to the Reader

Take care how you listen (Luke 8:18)! I begin with a question that has been asked throughout this paper, *are you saved?* I ask not whether you've *heard* the truth. Millions of people now agonizing in the eternal fires of hell have *heard* the truth of Jesus Christ. I ask not whether you have *impulsively* made a decision for Jesus Christ. I ask not whether you have *prayed* a prayer, walked an aisle, signed a card, prayed with a pastor, asked Jesus into your heart, or any other kind of "decision."

I do ask you this most important question: what do you *do* with what you have *heard*? How has the gospel affected you? How has the truth of the Word that has been sown sunk deep into your soul? Has it? If not, then flee to Jesus Christ for salvation before you sink deep into hell's torments forever! Do not linger! Do not gamble with the sovereign hand of God who gives you every breath and can take away your life at His sovereign prerogative! Kill your procrastination! Slaughter your worldliness! Recognize your lust for materialism, earthly comforts, riches, fear of man, worldly acceptance and run to the Redeemer who has died in the place of His elect! Find a Savior willing and eager to forgive! He loves to take hypocrites who humble themselves and transform their hypocrisy into true holiness. Hear the Word and *rightly respond* to the Word. Remain in it! Cling to it! Hold it fast! Persevere in it and so prove to be genuine disciples of Christ. Be not deceived! Jesus Christ alone saves! He alone secures! He preserves! But those who are truly His persevere in the Word that they hear and cling to it till they reach the bliss, glory, and eternal rest of heaven!