

MODERN PARABLES Part 5: The Sower 10.24.10

Movie of Readers: Matthew 13:3-9 ESV

Movie: The Sower [13:13]

Introduction: The parable of the sower and the seed is, perhaps, one of the best known parables of Jesus. Without question it is one of the most preached upon passages in Evangelical churches. I would guess there is not a person in this audience who has not heard at least one, and perhaps many, sermons about the sower and the seed. God is the great Sower and he scatters his seed, his message, across all nations and all peoples. The response of people to God's invitation is represented by the four soils. It is often a message of beginnings.

And as such those who are well down the path of following Christ could dismiss the parable, except for how it might impact on their own evangelical efforts of sharing Christ with others.

That, I believe, is a mistake, for there is a significant message here for all Christ-followers. I would note that in the parable of the sower there are four different kinds of soil - and in three of the four the seed begins new life. Yet in only one of those three does the seed grow, mature and multiply. How can our Christian lives be like the seed that grows, matures and multiplies? That will be our focus this evening.

Important transition: What does the seed represent? Jesus tells us.

Seed = the **WORD OF GOD** in my life.

"Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God."

Luke 8:11 ESV, also Matthew 13:10, Mark 4:14

Luke uses "Word of God." Mark (the first) just uses "Word." Matthew uses "Word of the kingdom." We should not narrow or limit "Word of God" to refer only to the Bible. It is the Word of God, but the meaning of the seed, I think, is broader. It includes God's Spirit in my life, God's core precepts and principles becoming my own. It refers to a will surrendered to God's will and a desire of God's kingdom to be revealed. It includes a desire to be a part of God's kingdom and a part of His plan.

Thesis: My goal in life - for God's W.O.R.D. to G.R.O.W. in me.

The question is "how does God's Word, His kingdom, His plans, His will grow in me, become a part of me?" In typical Jesus language, his answer is revealed in the negative - by how it does NOT happen. Jesus tells us three ways that the seed, or how the WORD of God does not succeed, does not grow, before talking about the results of success when the Word of God flourishes in our lives. **Let's examine all four results and in the process take away a lesson that can help us know how God's WORD might GROW in me.**

1. We read first about the seed that falls on the hardened foot-path. The birds snatch it up. Luke tells us the seed is trampled underfoot. Jesus:

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path." Matthew 13:19 ESV

W **WAKEN** to my need for God's G **GERMINATION**.

Notice that there is nothing different about the sower. There is nothing different about the seed. The only difference is the soil. In this case the soil is hard, like concrete. It doesn't allow the seed in to germinate, to begin the growth process. In the same way, we are dead to God's Word, to His message. We quite literally do not have the ability to hear God's Word outside of His miraculous mercy.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”
Ephesians 2:1 NKJV

Jesus describes this “wakening process” as a new birth -
Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3 NET

Some translations use the phrase “born again.” It is a clever play on words, for another means both “from above” and “again.”

ἀνωθεν (**anōthen**): **from above; again, a repetition**

Just as none of us can take credit for the oxygen we breathe when we are physically born, none can take any credit for their own righteousness in accepting God's call and becoming a Christ-follower. But you can pray for God's mercy. You can ask him to open your heart and your life to His Spirit and to His Word.

Offer to pray for someone to come to faith right now.

This is not a neutral ground. We are not in Switzerland. We are in enemy territory. Every habit of your life and every notion in your head is bent against God. Your heart is as hard as concrete. And even as we talk about this the spirits of the air are fighting hard in your mind. Your heart beats faster. Pray for God's germination.

Lead in a sinner's prayer.

2. Even if God's WORD begins the germination process in your life,
Jesus tells us there are ways we can be robbed of this new life!
“As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” Matthew 13:20-21 ESV

Focus on two parts of this. (1) The WORD of God is lost WHEN tribulation or persecution comes. Circle “When,” because it's never a matter of “if” in the Christian life... always a matter of “When.” And not just the normal tribulations or persecutions either, but the ones that are directly attached to your decision to be a Christ-follower. Fear is what we are talking about. (2) The reason fear takes hold is because the person “has not root in himself.” Circle “In Himself.” This is a big problem for second generation Christians, especially. You cannot expect the Word of God to grow in you based on someone else's experience. **Which leads to...**

O **OVERTURN** my fears so God's Word takes R **ROOT**.

Job One for all Christ-followers is to mature in our faith, to discipline ourselves so that God's Word might take root. Prayer. Bible. Meditation. Church. Christian relationships. All are a big part of remaining in the faith regardless of what troubles come our way.

“Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught.” Colossians 2:7a GNT

Underline the “keep your roots deep in him.” Christ-follower, we not only do this in the beginning, but we keep on... we keep our roots deep... we continue our disciplines that keep us focused upon God.

Often we become sidetracked on all the good things that we are doing... raising a family... keeping a job... serving at church. These are all good and evidence of a fruitful life. But if the root dies, the tree dies. *It's the maturity in my life below the surface that matters!*

3. Jesus tells us that there is another way that the seed can fail:

“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.” Matthew 13:22 ESV

This is the subtle delusion of “Jesus Plus.” The frontal attack of our enemy is to talk us out of beginning our relationship with Christ. If that doesn't work, Satan will attack us directly with tribulations and persecutions hoping we will just give up. But when those two strategies fail, the third attack is the most subtle, the most devious, and the most dangerous. “Sure you can have Jesus. That doesn't mean that you can't have everything else too.” Jesus Plus. But Jesus warns that the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches will “choke the word.” **Therefore I must:**

R **RID** my life of everything that O **OPPOSES** God's Word.

This seems obvious in abstract but most difficult in application. Of course we should rid ourselves of anything that opposes God's Word. But (and here's the rub) what's included? Answer: a lot of very good things. Two broad categories (1) cares of the world. This might make up 90% of your waking life and each one of them can be justified. The job. The family. The bills. The meals. The clothes. The school. The yard. The garbage. The tax return. The monthly reports. The hobby. The game. The TV. The books. You ask, “What are you saying Mark? I need to rid my life of all these things?” The answer - possibly. If ANYTHING gets in the way of God's Word growing in your life you need to remove it.

“So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back.” Hebrews 12:1 NCV

The irony here is that God does not want to remove these things from our lives. He loves creativity. He loves your joy and your happiness. But He also wants your relationship. And He knows that there is nothing better for you than being in relationship with Him. The irony is that if we will turn our worry into prayer and allow the cares of this world to turn our hearts toward Him, He will give us a healthy way of dealing with these cares. (2) The other broad category is wealth. The danger is that once the cares are taken care of we are free to rely upon ourselves and not turn to God. Equally dangerous. Good things, not evil in themselves, can separate us.

4. Finally we come to the good soil:

“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.” Matthew 13:23 ESV

This is the very definition of success in the Christian life. Do you see it? Someone who (1) hears the word, (2) understands it, and (3) bears fruit... and in great multiplications of results! (100x, 60x, 30x).

D **DIRECT** my life so God's Word becomes God's W **WORK**.

This is the end game, the objective, what it's all about. God's Word, like the seed, is not something that is supposed to remain stagnant, or to get stolen away or misused. It is intended to be multiplied. God's Word should become God's Work in my life and in yours.

“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 NIV

Sometimes we think that there can be nothing wrong with God's seed so there must be something wrong with me. That really is stinking thinking, because God's Word tells us that we are God's workmanship, His masterpiece. And God don't make no junk! Not only are we His workmanship, but the work that He has for us is work He has prepared *in advance* for us to do. Sometimes we get this mistaken idea that God is looking around... Well I wonder what Mark could do... there must be something! But no. He created me. And you. And He created me (and you) for a purpose. And my entire life should be DIRECTED to discover that purpose and fulfill it!

If you are an experienced Christ-follower tonight, my prayer for you is that you would not be a 2/3rds kind of Christ-follower. What do I mean by a 2/3 Christian? Notice Jesus saying about the good soil: one who (1) hears the word and (2) understands it and then (3) does something about it. Far too many of us get stuck at (2). We think our lives are oriented to understanding. Not true! Our lives are directed to God's Work!

“You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.” James 2:18 MSG

The natural result of the growth process is that your work through Christ will grow many times and in many ways... ways you can not even imagine now.

Conclusion: I want you to know that this is my goal here at Church Requel, that I might help you in this growth process. Some of you may be struggling to let God's Word germinate in your life. Only God can grant you new spiritual life, but I would love to be the midwife that brings you into God's Kingdom. Someone may be struggling with persecution and tribulation. I'd love to be your encourager. Keep rooted in Christ. It'll be worth it. Some may struggle with cares or wealth. I'd love to be your coach. Lose the extra weight. Many of you may be discovering your purpose. I'd love to be your partner. This is what CR is all about!