

# The Simple Sowing of the Gospel Produces Fruit

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Have you ever tried a little bit of gardening? I've grown plants in many different places. I've lived in places where there is clay filled soil, sandy soil, rich black soil, and rocky ground. Any gardener will tell you that the soil makes all the difference. One year I decided not to plant much of anything. I hardly did any work. But I still ended up with a small and productive crop. That's because some seeds came up in one of the best garden soils in anyone's yard: the mulch pile. You've probably noticed how different soil conditions allow for different results. What about the conditions of the human heart? Today we consider Jesus teaching about what happens when the Word of God is planted into our hearts.

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd. Some were astonished and were wondering, "Could this be the Son of David?" They were wondering if Jesus was the promised Messiah and world's Savior. But not everyone in that crowd took his message to heart. Some, including the Pharisees were accusing him of being of the devil and a lying sinner. So, Jesus goes on to teach everyone about how there are different responses to the hearing of the message of the kingdom of God. He puts the picture in terms the crowds around him would understand. He shares the picture of seeds in different types of soils.

Some of the seeds that a sower spreads land in a pathway. The seed is of course good. But the birds who see it don't care about the life of the seed. They just devour whatever seed is readily available.

Jesus explains how this situation relates to sharing the gospel. The seed that is sown in each setting is like the gospel. The gospel has the power to create life. But the devil works to stop it from even germinating. The first soil is like the one who receives the message of the kingdom, but it is snatched away by the evil one. Think of all the times that God has shared the gospel and the message never even begins to grow. The devil knows that the Word of God is powerful and gives life. So he will do whatever he can to stop it from taking any hold in anyone's heart. There are so many who hear about the kingdom of God. They hear the news of how God's Son came into this world was born as a man. They hear how he lived a perfect life, showed his majesty and glory, taught about the way to life, and suffered and died on the cross. They hear the proclamation that he rose to life and promised eternal life to all who believe in him. They understand it, but they don't understand it with the heart of faith. "Why should I listen to my Christian friend? What makes this message any different?" So, they are indifferent to the gospel. Never ponder it. Never take it to heart. The message of the risen Jesus comes, and they dismiss it with the devil's lie, "God would never do that. Don't pay any attention."

But what about you? What reasons might you give for dismissing the gospel message? What things in your life might give the devil opportunity to snatch away the seed? "I know that this seed is life-giving, but I've got to have a life too. I don't have time for worship today, tomorrow, Sunday, or tonight. I don't think I'll read the Bible just now. Maybe when I'm older. Maybe when I'm more ready." How often don't you and I find that there's opportunity to hear the gospel, but we don't even let it take root? The devil wins as he takes opportunity to snatch away the powerful gospel from our hearts and our hearts can then lay barren, lifeless, and fruitless.

Another picture is that of the seed sown in the rocky place. Around here we're familiar with the rocky formations that limit soil depths and with what the heat of the sun can do to plants. Jesus explains that this is like when someone hears the Word and the seed is allowed some growth, but only can grow so far. The Word cannot produce fruit because it had no real root. Consider the person who hears the word of God and is excited about it. "Pastor, I've never heard it explained that way before! Really, you mean forgiveness is free! God has reconciled me through the death of his Son so that I have peace with him! My creator loves me that much? I'm that guilty of sin, but still pardoned?" The new life is there! The Word of God creates faith and grows in even the harshest environment where you'd never expect it. But when hard times come it withers, is soon fruitless and dead. The superficial faith cannot be productive and does not last long. The Christian who sees and hears what God's Word says but is unwilling to let it take hold of their hearts will not have a strong faith. Rather than letting the Word take hold of their life, take control, they stubbornly refuse to allow it. The Word grows but soon encounters a heart so stubborn and hard it will not allow God's Word to flourish. Such a superficial faith will die. The Christian who thinks they can be a Christian, but not make room for God's Word in their lives will fall away. Jesus explains that affliction and persecution are the death of the shallow faith. What happens when the superficial Christian faces affliction in life? When the shallow in faith are told, "God will work out all for your good." They balk, "I don't believe it. I won't believe it." And they turn against God instead of enduring the affliction. When persecution because of the Word comes they also cannot withstand it. Their faith is fruitless and soon dead.

What good is it if you bring your child to baptism, but then fail to teach them the Word of God? How long will such a faith hold? How long will it take before a child who is never told, "Jesus loves you" no longer loves Jesus? The Christian parent who thinks that a mere weekly attendance at Bible class or Sunday school lesson is like the gardener who is content to let their garden die in the hot sun. A Christian without a mature faith has a ready-to-perish faith. When your spouse or friend goes through a Bible instruction class, is that enough for a life-long faith? When your child attends less than a hundred confirmation lessons how long will their faith endure without taking deeper root in their heart? Look back to the start of

this congregation and even to the very start of the Christian church and you will see many who had a shallow and superficial faith which ended up withering during hard times. Their fate is no better than those who had the gospel snatched away by the devil. It is only all the sadder and more tragic that they lost what had once given them joy. Is there anything more painful than seeing a young child-like faith turn into a jaded and superficial faith that is fruitless and soon dead? How many times have you yourself found your heart not allowing room for the Word to take root? Will you be ready to face hard times and persecution?

The third picture is that of the seed which is sown among the thorns. Like all the other seeds it will grow and produce and bring new life. But the life is short because of the weeds. It is choked by the weeds and dies. This soil is like when the message is heard but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it. Worry is at the heart of unbelief. After all, what is worry except the opposite of faith and trust in God? The only cure for worry is a deep-rooted faith in the Word and promises of God. And an opposite danger to worry is the deceitfulness of wealth. It lulls the Christian into a false security. It starts rather harmlessly. "I only need this to survive...and this to be comfortable... and this to be secure. "I *must* have this to be comfortable and secure." Soon the heart is putting its trust in wealth. "I don't need Jesus. I have all I need already." The deceit is only discovered when it is too late and worries or wealth has sprung up like a choking weed.

Consider the times in your life when you've been on either end of this spectrum –either so worried about getting by that you didn't have time for the Word and your faith was choked, or so well off that you didn't have time for the Word and your faith was choked. Those who are like the choked soil are the worldly-minded. It's a real danger for all!

The last picture Jesus gives is that of the seed in good soil. This seed does exactly what God intends. It produces new life and abundant fruit. The measure and amount of that fruit should not matter. It will vary. God works in each of us just what he determines. But the point is that the seed bears fruit because it is not snatched, not shallow, and not snuffed out. The seed itself produces fruit. I'm always amazed at how true this is. There are certainly many things that can discourage us from sharing God's Word. When I worry about if what I'm doing is worthwhile, I remember it doesn't depend on me. The seed that God spreads with his Word does have the power to grow. And I also don't despair when someone no longer shows signs of faith. God has not failed. Jesus points out there will be different responses. Just because some of the kids who attended a Christian day School fell away from the faith doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile to have a Christian Day school. Just because some who were confirmed no longer show signs of spiritual life but have fallen away doesn't mean confirmation class is a waste of time. Just because some who join our congregation and take instruction in the Word don't hold strong and take deep root doesn't mean we should stop trying to spread the Word to everyone who will listen. When one neglects the Word, despises it, and dismisses it, others will still flourish in it. Don't stop spreading the seed. Don't think it isn't worth your time, your abilities, your resources to support the spread of the gospel.

Sharing the Word is always worth it. But first we must ask ourselves, "What am I doing with the Word?" Do you give the evil one opportunity to even prevent it from taking root? Or meditate on it? Let it take a deep hold on your life. Let that Word by God's working direct your every move and desire. Let it take such a deep and mature root that no affliction can phase you. So that when persecution comes you can draw on its life-giving power. Memorize it. Dedicate it to heart. And instead of giving your children a garden full of weeds, watch out for the things that would choke their faith. Watch out firstly in your own life. Let the music you hear, the words you speak by flowing with the Word of God. Gladly hear it. Learn it. "He who has an ear, let him hear." I used to think this phrase just meant that this news was for everyone. Now I understand it even more clearly. It is not only for everyone to hear, it is for everyone to take to heart, fully understand, and mature in it. Ponder it. Never tire of hearing that Word, sharing it, and looking for fruit. Pray that the seed which is sown would take deep root in your heart, and the hearts of those around you. Pray God would deliver us from the evil one and his schemes. Pray that the world and its desires would not pull God's people from his Word.

It's amazing to see the grace of Jesus. He had been called a servant of the devil, had been put down, and had the people reject him. Yet he still shared the word. And as he did so he also saw that Word taking root in the hearts of those around him. Why? Because what he designs, and wills is that the Word works life. The life it works first and foremost is the life that is ours through faith in him. It is the message of God's Son coming to this world. He was born to be like us. Yet unlike us his heart was only good. Never a moment could the devil get a hold of him. Not a single bit of his heart was shallow or superficial when it came to producing and taking a strong spiritual root. The worries of this life and the deceit of wealth could never choke him or pull him aside from fulfilling what he came to do: producing a fruit a million-fold by planting a harvest. And it was worth it for this crop! He made it worth everything as gave his life for the world.

He gave his life for every heart in this world. And he wants that gospel message to reach every corner. He died for the one who has only a shallow and superficial love. He gave his word that they might have a faith that takes root and flourishes. He poured out his blood to bring life to the heart that worries about so many things and the heart that buries itself in the trap of the love of money. He did this so they could receive that good news of the love of God that far outweighs any wealth of this world and removes all our worries. He died so that his Word would be shared with you and that by his grace it would take root, spring up, withstand persecution and affliction, and bear fruit to his glory. The simple sowing of the gospel seed produces fruit!