



THE SOWER **WENT OUT TO SOW**

A study of the "Parable of the Sower" of Matthew 13



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A study of the "Parable of the Sower" of Matthew 13

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(note)

This work has been made with the hope that together we can search the scripture and develop a greater understanding of it. Hopefully, it will make your study of this topic more edifying, more profitable, and more enjoyable. It is not intended to take the place of your responsibility to prepare for the studies. Please devote adequate time to the material before our study, so we can all be edified by one another (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In this lesson book, you will find preparation instructions and thought questions on the left hand side of every lesson's first page. Please consider these thought questions and reading assignments before you begin your study of the lessons as they will help guide you in your preparation.

This study is a compilation of material I have created, some of Don Swanson's material on sowing, and a couple elements from "The Open Bible".

The picture on the front of this book is of Van Gogh's painting, "The Sower".

All verse references are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1977).

Introduction

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER BLESSINGS THAT COME TO MIND THAT THE CHRISTIAN ALONE ENJOYS?

HOW HIGH DO YOU RANK THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH OTHERS?

HOW HIGH OF A RANK DO YOU THINK SEED SOWING **SHOULD** HAVE?

CAN WE BE PLEASING TO GOD IF WE ARE NOT INVOLVED IN SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH THE LOST?

HOW DID THE GOSPEL SPREAD FROM JERUSALEM? (ACTS 8)

The value of sowing the seed.

We certainly enjoy rich blessings as Christians! To name a few:

1. Fellowship with one another in Christ (I John 1:7)
2. Peace that passes understanding (Phil 4:7)
3. Promise of our daily needs being met (Mt 6)
4. Hope of life as an anchor for the soul (Heb 6:19)

One quality that a Christian must have is to regard others as more important than himself. (Philippians 2:3) Therefore, as a child of God one primary objective that we should have is to teach others. One of the last directives given by the Lord before His ascension was to instruct the apostles to go forth and to teach all nations. (Mark 16) The Lord saw to it that He had trained faithful men to teach the word, and these faithful men saw to it that they trained other faithful men who could teach the word to the lost. (II Timothy 2:2)

We must take the charge to teach others very seriously just as the Bible does. The responsibility to put others ahead of ourselves comes into focus when we consider that our friends, family, co-workers, etc.:

1. Are not in fellowship with us.
2. Are not at peace.
3. Have no promise of daily needs.
4. Have only a terrifying expectation of judgment.

However, many times our own wants are placed upon teaching others. "I don't want to harm our friendship." "I don't want them to think I am some kind of religious nut." We must realize that putting our own wants ahead of the needs of others violates a direct command and an example given to us in the word of God! (Philippians 2:3, John 10 & 15).

There are so many benefits to preaching the gospel; it helps

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to consider a few of these benefits as we begin:

1. It fulfills a command of God.
2. We get to know the gospel more intimately as a teacher.
3. God is glorified by the keeping of His word and the extension of His kingdom.
4. Satan is thwarted.
5. Another soul is redeemed from Hell and on the path to Heaven.
6. We get to keep our friends and acquaintances beyond the boundary of this life.

The soil perspective

One perspective that is usually used to teach this parable is from the perspective of the field. In other words, the parable is used to help people determine what kind of soil they are.

Four types of soil, hearts, are enumerated. There is the wayside heart, the thorny heart, the stony heart, and the good heart. When we consider the parable from this perspective we see that there are only four types of heart. When we study with people, we often hear people say, “I’m not any of those hearts”. This is not the case. The Lord listed four types of heart, and that is what there is. We all fall into one of those categories one way or another. The beauty of this illustration lies in the fact that just like the ground, hearts can change. A stony heart can have the stones removed. A thorny heart can be weeded. A wayside heart can be tilled.

The sower perspective

While we recognize that there is validity to the soil perspective, it is easy to see from the context that it was also preached from the sower perspective. When the parable was first given, it was to the multitude. One might say that this was to the soil. However, when the parable was explained, this was done for the apostles, the sowers.

Jesus was taking this opportunity to brief the apostles on what they would encounter as apostles. No doubt they had already witnessed much of this as this parable takes place after the “limited commission” of chapter ten.

Objectives of this study

Many people do not sow the seed today. We find churches where the preacher just makes a few lessons a week, the elders just oversee the treasury and worship services, and the deacons just keep the building clean and maintained. Many times in these churches there

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is a general defeatist attitude toward evangelism. The brethren are not teaching and are not being encouraged to do so, mainly because the leadership is not involved in the endeavor either. Much of the lack of involvement in this endeavor is likely due to folks not remembering or knowing how to go about doing it. It is very hard to begin doing something when we have no idea where to start.

There are certain things about this parable that we want to take away from this study. Here is a list of some of them:

1. The word is capable as a seed.
2. The results will depend on the soil.
3. The sower must sow.
4. The sowing and the reaping may be by different people at different times.
5. The Lord's providence in evangelism is alive and well.
6. How to recognize and take advantage of an open door.
7. The need for prayer.
8. The desire to be fruit bearers to our fullest potential.
9. The increase is the responsibility of the Lord, not ours.

Some times are better than others.

One common mentality we find amongst our brethren is the attitude that the "field is not always white". There is some truth to this, yet many times this is just a euphemism for "I don't want to do any more than is absolutely required of me", i.e. attend services once a week.

After the Lord gave this parable in Matthew 13, the apostles inquired of Him as to why He spoke in parables. Why not just give the gospel to them straight, rather than through word pictures. The Lord explained to the apostles that the problem was not in the delivery, the problem was in their heart. He was talking to a nation that was hard-hearted.

The Lord desires for all to hear the gospel and come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9) The people not hearing had nothing to do with any desire of God for them not to hear. In actuality, the people had rejected the grace of God, His word, repeatedly. They did not want to hear, therefore they did not. However, the Lord said to the apostles in John 4:35 that the field was white for harvest. The only problem? Not enough workers. All this said to illustrate that just because one group does not want to hear does not mean that

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there is no one to hear the gospel. From the midst of that wicked and perverse generation the Lord began the kingdom and it was not hampered, but flourished.

The whiteness of the field is not up to our evaluation. Even if there is but one heart in the entire world that will be receptive, we have the responsibility to sow the seed, hoping to lay it in that one piece of prime real estate! We sing the song “You Never Mentioned Him to Me”. The idea behind this song is that on the last day, someone stands in front of us and makes the accusation that we ran into each other day in and day out, yet never proclaimed the gospel to them. How terrible if this was to be the case! We must be people who are willing to take advantage of open doors as they present themselves.

It is easy to rationalize in our minds that there is no sense wasting our time door knocking, visiting, speaking to people we meet, or teaching people we know because it does not work. The great danger in this is that it denies the power of God and the power of His Word. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but the Lord gave the increase. I am convinced that if we consider how to accomplish this today and get busy doing it, the Lord will bless our efforts. He may bless them in the way we expect, or he may bless them in ways we do not expect, but He WILL bless them. However, just as He blesses effort, we have likewise seen Him curse those that are not bearing fruit, such as the fig tree of Mark 11. Imagine the Lord’s displeasure if we are neglecting a full third of the work that He has given the church to do, evangelism!

Our growth depends on sowing

We want to grow as a church. We want to grow as Christians. We want to grow in reward. Our growth in all these areas is dependent upon our sowing the seed and thus bearing fruit. Consider John 15:2:

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.”

Bearing no fruit does not make me a poor Christian. Bearing no fruit results in my removal from the tree, that is, the exact opposite of being a Christian. Jesus was a fruit-producer. “Help me to be more like the master” should be our cry. Space in the kingdom is precious. Every square inch is needed for fruit-producers. How blessed it is for the keeper of the field to prune us that we may go on to bear more fruit, thereby increasing His glory!

The Sower

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW
13, ROMANS 1 AND
ISAIAH 55

IN ROMANS
1:16-17, WHAT DID
PAUL MEAN BY THE
STATEMENT, "FROM
FAITH TO FAITH"?

TO WHOM DID
ISAIAH PRIMARILY
WRITE?

WHAT DOES
"SOWING IN
FAITH" MEAN TO
YOU?

CAN ALL
CHRISTIANS BE
DESCRIBED AS
SOWERS?

WHAT DO YOU
THINK IS THE
INDIVIDUAL
RESPONSIBILITY TO
SOW OF EACH
CHRISTIAN?

Behold...

This parable begins with the simple word "behold". It is an imperative word that means to take notice of a remarkable thing. 1281 times this word is found in our bible, 223 of which are in the New Testament. The majority of the instances in the New Testament are found in the four gospels. It is a word that Jesus used often to bring attention to an important thing He was about to say. As Jesus often spoke in parables, He is asking the listener to envision the remarkable picture He is drawing with words.

The command to pay attention to this parable is just as important today as it was 2000 years ago! So much can be gained by considering the lesson of this parable. As we take notice of this parable, we must understand the purpose of a parable. A parable was a story that was used to teach an overall concept. An allegory, such as is found in Galatians 4 regarding the two mountains is a story where every element of it has meaning. Therefore, we must be careful to not do damage to the text by reading more into it than is there. Of course, since the Lord gave the overall understanding and the meaning of the individual pieces to the apostles later in the chapter, we can safely speak of which elements had meaning.

What misunderstandings can we come to regarding God if we read into every element of the following parables:

The master in the talent parable of Matthew 25? _____

The judge in Luke 18:1-8? _____

The Sower

The Sower...

The man of this parable is a sower. He sows because that is what he does, that is who he is. If he was busying himself with anything else, he would not be a sower. As we are introduced to this sower, where else would we expect to find him or what else would we expect him to be doing?

As mentioned in our last study, Jesus gives this parable to the ones that needed to receive the seed, and then later in the chapter He gave the meaning to the ones who would be sowing the seed. Of course, as this applies to you and me today, we are all to be sowers. The Lord expects fruit of us, therefore sowing must be done.

He sows in faith.

Why is it that some sowers are not successful? Many people have the idea that preachers and Christians do not want to work. While this may be true in some circumstances, I am convinced that this is not the case with the vast majority of Christians. I believe that brethren have a strong desire to teach others, to see their respective local churches grow, and to see their friends and acquaintances come to join in the work and the blessings of the Lord's vineyard.

The sower in this parable was a man of faith. In order to be a farmer, one has to be a person of faith. He must have faith in the techniques used, faith in the seed, and faith that the harvest will be profitable. A sower in the Lord's church must be the same kind of person. We must be people who have faith that the Lord's command to preach will bear fruit. We must have faith that the seed still has the same power of which Paul spoke in Romans 1:16-17. We must have faith that there will certainly be a harvest.

There is one primary difference between the sower of the Word and the farmer. The farmer sows in faith, but has no promise of a profit. I have heard farmers say that they could just as easily make \$250,000 from a harvest as lose \$250,000. The farming has no promise of success. This is not the case with sowing the seed of the kingdom. Consider Isaiah 55:11:

“So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

The Sower

We often quote from this chapter in Isaiah. It is in this chapter that he asks why they spend money on what does not satisfy. It is in this chapter that he explains that the ways and thoughts of God are higher than our ways and thoughts. He also explains that God's word does not return empty (void in KJV).

Isaiah prophesied to Judah. He was speaking to a nation that had turned from God. This nation was headed for captivity just as their Israelite neighbors to the north had already suffered. Yet Isaiah tells them that the word of God does not return empty. It always accomplishes its purpose! Whether the alien comes to Christ or is hardened by the message, God's purpose has been accomplished. Unlike the farmer, we have a promise that preaching WILL bear fruit. There are few guarantees in life, but this is one!

So often we find brethren who are unwilling to work at sowing the seed because, "It just doesn't work" or "I've never seen any results from that". Certainly if I approach sowing as a defeatist, I would be better off spending my time doing something else. If I decided before I start that something can not be done, I am not likely to succeed at it. The truth is, God has promised the increase. I can no more convert a soul than the farmer can make a seed grow. They are both accomplished by the hand of God. I am merely the vessel through which the Lord's work is accomplished.

The patient farmer

In James 5, he speaks of a farmer. This farmer is wise in that he patiently waits for the early and the late rains. We have to remember that when the word patient is used in scripture, it generally is more to convey the idea of endurance. It is not saying that the farmer sits around "twiddling his thumbs" as he waits for rain to fall. What James is saying is that the farmer endures and diligently works from beginning to end until the farming process is complete!

We must likewise be patient sowers. Growth does not happen overnight. Nor does it happen as a result of "finger twiddling". If I am to see the harvest and partake of it, I must be patient in the biblical sense. That is, a hard worker who sees the project through from beginning to end. Paul told the Corinthians that he was a planter, Apollos was a waterer, and the Lord is the increaser. Each of us have different roles in sowing the seed, but just like Paul we need to have a plan for working the field and enduring until the time of harvest!

The Sower

Preparation

We are done a slight disservice in this parable. It begins with, “Behold, the sower went out to sow”. What about before that? Did the sower just wake up one morning and magically have seed and a place ready for the seed to be planted? Of course he did not. The sower, as with farming today, requires much preparation. The soil has to be prepared for the seed. A way of watering the crop must be available. Knowledge of the ground must be obtained. Seed must be procured. The list goes on.

If I am to be a sower today, I must be prepared to do so. How then is a sower in the Lord’s kingdom to prepare? Consider the following ideas:

- Must have knowledge of the word. (Romans 1:16-17)
- Must have understanding of the heart.
- Must have a plan for tending (watering) the field. (I Corinthians 3)
- Must have invested time in prayer. (II Thessalonians 3)
- Must keep his own house in order. (Matthew 7)
- Must have knowledge of the best way to sow. (Acts 17)

These are just a few preparation considerations. There are, no doubt, many more. Let us keep in mind that sowing the seed of the kingdom is indeed an endeavor worth investing time in preparation.

A fulfilling work

There are so many hats that people wear today. We can occupy our time with many things. So often “would-be” sowers are caught in Satan’s trap of the things we can do to “better” spend our time. Are you a sower as commanded in the word of God? Do people look and see that in you? Or, do they look at you and see some other role that you fill.

Every Christian wants to reap a harvest. We all want to be able to stand before the master on that last day and present fruit to Him that has been born through our effort. Yet many Christians do not invest the time in making that dream happen! There is indeed nothing better we can do with our time. For the sake of the Lord’s work, for our sake, and the sake of our friends and neighbors, let us be sowers!

Went Out

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13

WHAT DOES THE SOWER "WENT OUT" MEAN TO YOU?

WHERE DID THE SOWER GO?

WHAT WAS THE SOWER'S PURPOSE IN GOING?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS OF GOING OUT THAT YOU CAN THINK OF?

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE VALUE OF HAVING A PLAN FOR GOING OUT?

WHERE ARE THE BOUNDARIES TO YOUR "COMFORT ZONE"?

HOW CAN YOU EXTEND THOSE BOUNDARIES?

Went Out...

Where did the sower go? He went out! Sowing the seed is something that can not be done from one's easy chair in the living room. It requires effort of us and a willingness to go. Think about the Lord's words as He gave the Great Commission in Mark 16:

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

The Great Commission begins with the word "go". In order for the gospel to be spread, the apostles had to be willing to go out into the world and preach it.

A great point of contention between the Lord and the Jews was His willingness to go wherever the message need be preached. In Matthew 9, Jesus has called Matthew to be an apostle. As He passed by Matthew, He simply said "Follow Me!" and Matthew did so. After the Lord called Matthew, He was having a meal with he and his associates when the Pharisees raised an objection at verse 11:

"Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?"

The Lord, however, overheard this and responded with:

"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."

The Pharisees were so intent on appearances and strictly adhering to their tradition of prejudice that they were unwilling to go to the sinner and try to help.

A Christian must be willing to go out and teach the lost. It requires hard work and a willingness to leave our "comfort zone", but the rewards are amazing. The Lord quickly identifies the heart problem that prevented the Pharisees from doing what they should have done. Notice verse 13 of Matthew 9:

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“But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The Pharisees had no compassion for those that were lost. They were completely driven by the selfish motivation of keeping up appearances and following the law that they had invented. Indeed, they were experts at laying aside the law of God for their tradition. (Mark 7:9) As Jesus “went out” to sow, the Pharisees needed to “go out” and learn what the scripture meant!

Leaving our Comfort Zone

Comfort Zone is a fairly modern term that was coined to define the situation in which a person feels most at ease. It has become such a part of our English language that you will find it in the dictionary. The “Oxford American Dictionary” defines it as “a place or situation where one feels safe or at ease and without stress”. Most people will tend to stick very close to this “comfort zone” in all situations, religious included. What do you think the following people’s “comfort zones” were?

1. The Apostle Matthew _____

2. Luke _____

3. John Mark _____

4. Timothy _____

To what degree do you think these men were willing to leave their “comfort zone” as the scripture reveals?

1. The Apostle Matthew _____

2. Luke _____

3. John Mark _____

(Mark did eventually come around as indicated at II Timothy 4:11)

4. Timothy _____

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It is a great temptation for the Christian to try and do the minimum to get by. I am convinced that many want to do more, but the discomfort involved is difficult to overcome. Some of us are blessed with the ability to talk to anyone, anywhere, about anything spiritual, yet most of us have to work diligently at breaking our comfort zone. However, if we are to be sowers of the seed, it is going to require our conquering this fear.

Did You Know?

1. Most experiences a person has with talking to those in the community are positive.
2. People will generally be happy to talk with you about things regarding the Bible.
3. There are ways of speaking with others that will increase your positive results.
4. There is more than one way to teach the gospel to people.
5. The Lord will help you in your attempts to preach the gospel.
6. Your “comfort zone” can be changed.

Moses’ Spokesperson

In Exodus 4 we have the account of Moses being called by God for the purpose of leading the people out of Egyptian bondage. Initially, Moses was not convinced that he was the man for the job. His first problem with God’s plan was what would happen if the people did not believe him when he told them the Lord had sent him for the purpose of their release. The Lord quieted these reservations by giving Moses a few miracles he could do as signs. Yet, Moses’ feelings persisted. His next objection was his lack of eloquence. Moses says that he is “slow of speech and slow of tongue”. Yet the Lord reminded him of the simple fact that He is the one who made Moses’ tongue, so He was well aware of that which it was capable!

“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”

Are we not often guilty of the same thing? Do we look at the Lord’s command to sow and think, “I am not capable of speaking to others”. There are a couple of questions that we

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need to ask ourselves.

1. Do we serve a loving God?
2. If yes, then would He command us something like sowing of which we are not capable?
3. If no, then what do I need to do to accomplish what He has commanded?

Dare we continue in the path of Moses. One would think that after the Lord answered his every complaint that Moses would have accepted his charge. However, the record does not bear this. At verse 13, after being told to “go”, Moses said, “Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever Thou wilt.” Yet, Moses did not truly mean this statement. The person that the Lord “wilt” was Moses and he was failing to comply. This angered God. Ultimately, the Lord allows Moses to use his brother Aaron as a spokesperson and the two go to Pharaoh. Will we be like Moses and look for another to do our duty, or will we take up the charge to sow for ourselves and proclaim the good news?

More than one way...

Many times people have decided that the only way to teach others is to have a class with them. However, this is not the case. There are many roles that must be filled in the endeavor to teach the lost. Maybe you know many people and can go along to set the teacher up with these potential students. Maybe you are adept at setting studies up on your own and bringing in those capable of teaching. Maybe you are capable of teaching yourself. Whatever your ability is, the fact is that you have one! There is something you can do.

Moses conquered

We do not want to short change Moses. He is a conqueror. Although he initially hesitated, the fact remains that he went. He went on to be a valiant leader for the Lord, bringing the people from Egyptian bondage to a land flowing with milk and honey. He extended his comfort zone. Though we see a man who at the outset could not see how he could possibly speak to the people, he ended his tenure as leader of the people delivering a farewell address that stands out in the word of God.

If we will trust in the Lord’s command and His providential care in seeing that it can be done, we can do great thing in His service. Let us go out!

To Sow

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13, ACTS 2, 8, 17 AND GALATIANS 2

WHAT SOWING TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU?

ARE THERE ANY TOOLS YOU SEE MISSING?

HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR CURRENT SOWING METHOD?

WHAT ARE WAYS THAT YOUR METHOD COULD BE IMPROVED?

WHAT ARE SOME IDEAS YOU HAVE FOR WAYS THE CHURCH HERE CAN MORE EFFECTIVELY SOW THE SEED?

Sowing Defined

Sowing is a way of planting that involves scattering seed over or on the earth. Other terms that have the same meaning would be scatter or broadcast. I prefer the term broadcast because it conjures pertinent images in our minds.

Consider a radio or television station. They broadcast signals and are likely what came to your mind when the word broadcast was used. When a station broadcasts, they know a number of things:

1. An approximation of how many people are listening.
2. What types of people are listening.
3. How far the message is going.
4. How the signal behaves.
5. The best way to get the signal to as many as possible.

These are things that the sower must know in order to effectively sow.

1. How many people are hearing the message?
2. How well do I understand the different types of heart?
3. How can I proclaim the message more effectively?
4. What is the best way to deliver the message to the people?

Will it work?

Much seed sowing is hampered by thoughts of “will it work?” Why do we not see that God commands us to sow, therefore it can be done and will work. As we examine the characters of the New Testament, we do not find a “will it work?” mentality. We see men who trusted that the gospel would work in men’s lives because they had seen it happen. Consider Paul. In Romans 1 he tells us “I am not ashamed of the gospel”. Paul trusted that the seed would accomplish its purpose, so he went about sowing it. Not only did he sow, he says in the same chapter, “I am eager...” to do so!

To Sow

Techniques

The book of Acts gives us many examples of the first century Christians sowing the seed of the kingdom. We can learn much about sowing from these accounts. How did the men of the New Testament sow the seed?

Paul...

Paul told the Corinthian church in the first letter, chapter 9, that he became “all things to all men” that he might “win the more”. Paul understood that in things that are of no consequence spiritually speaking, he could conform to those to whom he was speaking and win more of them. This, of course, is not to be misunderstood by thinking that we can compromise on the word of God, only on things that are of no consequence. This ability to sow the seed by meeting the people on the level where he found them shines through in the account of his sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17. Had he begun to speak to these men in another way, they would not have listened. However, Paul had studied the city for some time and knew exactly how to approach them.

If we make sowing the seed a priority in our lives as Paul did, we will be successful. The technique of reading people and their surroundings and preaching to them from that common ground is invaluable. Paul knew that the Jew would find offense and not listen if he went first to the Gentile in a city, so he proclaimed the message of first importance in the synagogue. After the Jew had their opportunity, Paul would then preach to the Gentile population in a way they could understand. Paul’s example shows us that we can share the gospel with anyone, regardless of where they are spiritually or their walk of life. Paul preached the same gospel to the one given over to paganism like those in Corinth, to those who were God-fearing like the Jews, to the rich like the prominent women, and to the poor. To be successful, we have to understand the ones to whom we are speaking and deliver the message to them in a way they can understand and easily see the relevance.

Peter...

Peter had a different purpose in the vineyard of the Lord from Paul. In Galatians 2, Paul tells us that he was sent to the Gentiles while Peter was sent to the circumcised. Thus, Peter’s primary purpose was to preach the gospel to the Jew. Therefore, when we read of Peter preaching the gospel in the book of Acts, we find his sermons being a little different from those of Paul, although the same message was being preached. When Peter spoke, he understood he was dealing with people who had a good grasp of the law. Peter’s main purpose, then, was to get these folks to see that the law pointed to Jesus. In

To Sow

Acts 2 we see Peter using quotations from the Old Testament to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This would be the best way to approach Jews about the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, when we compare this sermon to Paul's in Acts 17, we see that Paul did not use Old Testament quotations because these would have had little meaning to his audience. Instead he reasoned with them beginning with their own poets.

All of this being said to make the point, we must consider the soil. We have to think about what we are saying, but also about how we are saying. Disservice is done to the gospel when we have a mentality of, "I am just going to preach the same thing to everyone, those that accept it will and those that will not, won't." The apostles considered the recipient, and we must do likewise.

The gospel is for all.

It is also important to note at this point that the previous illustrations show us another thing. The gospel can be preached to anyone. Was Paul preaching a different gospel than Peter? Absolutely not! The difference was in their delivery. They wanted the gospel to be delivered in the most effective way possible. Sometimes people throw their hands up in the air and say that this person can not be reached by the gospel because _____. Yet, as we see, the gospel can be preached to any. It will just take some leg work on our part, such as research into the cultural background of those to whom I am speaking. Peter preached on Pentecost accordingly, Paul preached in Athens accordingly, and Philip began from the very scripture that the Eunuch was reading.

Loud English

People have a strange tendency. Have you ever noticed that when someone does not understand us, the natural thing to do is increase our volume. Most people you encounter on the Philippine island of Luzon can speak some degree of English. Yet, when I encountered one of the few who knew no English, I had to fight the urge to say the same thing, but louder. I had to keep saying to myself, "this person does not understand loud English either".

Why is it that when we try something and it does not work, we decide that doing the exact thing in the same way, only bigger is going to produce a different outcome? Preaching the gospel is no different. We must evaluate the people to whom we are speaking, their culture, age, religious background, sex, etc. before we can sow the seed. Some things that worked well in the past, may not work well this time around. 100 years ago, gospel

To Sow

meetings worked extremely well. All that a person really had to do was announce the meeting and souls would be saved. A church could reach many souls and grow by a two to four week meeting held annually. However, as time went by, this method of spreading the gospel has become less and less effective in the United States. There are still places where this works abroad, but not so much here. Unfortunately, instead of looking for other ways to sow, people have decided that sowing does not work. Sowing is not the problem, we just need to look for a better way of delivery. Today, people are different than they were then, culturally speaking. They are more isolated, therefore tactics that involve approaching people with which you already have a relationship about the gospel will be much more effective. The gospel meeting is now better used for edifying saints and inviting people whom you have already approached to a service that does not conflict with their own.

Effective Sowing

We are stewards of the seed, the gospel of Christ. Therefore, we not only need to sow, but we need to do it in the best way possible. We need to remember that souls are at stake! The better we are at spreading the word, the more souls can be won from the clutches of Satan. Here are some methods for sowing. What do you think are benefits and weaknesses of them?

1. Home Bible Study (i.e. four lesson book) _____
2. Monthly Adult Bible Study _____
3. Monthly Youth Bible Study _____
4. Ladies Class _____
5. Inviting People to Services Systematically (i.e. handing out invitations) _____
- _____
6. Submitting Contact Information for Visitation Nights _____
7. Door-to-Door cold-calling _____

The Seed

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW
13, JOHN 1,
MATTHEW 25,
II CORINTHIANS 9

WHAT ARE SOME
DIFFERENT THINGS
REFERENCED AS
“SEED” IN YOUR
NEW TESTAMENT?

WHY ARE EACH OF
THESE THINGS
REFERENCED AS
SEED?

STINGY SOWING IS
AN INDICATOR OF
WHAT HEART
PROBLEM?

WHAT IMPACT DO
YOU THINK THE
SOIL HAS ON THE
SEED?

WHAT IS THE
RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN BAPTISM,
THE SEED, AND
BEING BORN
AGAIN?

The Power of God

Where else could we begin with a discussion regarding the seed than Romans chapter one. Paul gives the brethren in Rome his speech of three “I ams” in this chapter. Paul says that I am under obligation to preach the gospel to all, I am eager to do so, and I am not ashamed of the gospel. Certainly an excellent lesson right there in those three points!

My father loves to plant a garden. It is an amazing thing to see those tiny seeds grow into delicious plants. It is a way to see God at work first-hand. He says that he finds it to be a very peaceful activity that allows one to think. No doubt another driving factor is considering the wonderful fruit that it produces! How much more so should we be encouraged to sow the seed when we consider the amazing fruit that is brought forth from it!

One great push that is made by people of the world and denominations is for the gospel to be somehow separate from God. However, we must realize that the gospel is powerful because of its close relationship to God. As a matter of fact, as John was writing about Jesus in chapter one of his gospel, he references Jesus as the “Word”. God and the Bible can not be separated. We can not know the way to God without His word, nor does the word have any power when separate from Him! The gospel accomplishes what it does because it is from the mouth of God, not men.

How powerful is the word? Jesus likens it to a mustard seed in Matthew 17:20. The apostles needed faith. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from hearing the word. If people hear the word and it produces a small amount of faith in them, wonderful things can be accomplished. Have you ever seen a mustard seed? They are unbelievably tiny. It is a great wonder how such a large plant can come from such a

The Seed

small seed. How much greater a wonder is the enormous fruit that comes from the seed and the faith it produces!

Natural Order

A seed produces after its kind. This was a law of nature that God set up in the beginning. God says this in Genesis 1:11-12:

“...plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with seed in them, after their kind..”

Have you ever planted a watermelon seed, only to have corn come from it? Of course you have not. Seed produces only that from which it came.

There are two aspects to this. Firstly, when the seed of the gospel is planted, it can only produce a Christian. If we carefully follow what is found in God’s word, that is the only thing that it prepares us to do. The only way seed can produce another type of plant is if it is put in the ground with something else and springs forth a hybrid. The gospel is the same. The only way something other than a Christian is produced by the gospel, is if man’s thinking is added to it.

Secondly, a Christian can only be produced by planting the seed. If I plant a watch in the ground, do not expect a watch tree! It is not seed. Although this example is complete nonsense, people try to do it spiritually all the time. How can I plant gymnasiums, potlucks, Super Bowl parties, financial seminars, and marriage retreats and expect it to produce a Christian? At best I sprinkle in a little seed and end up with a hybrid, someone who has a little gospel under their belt, but has only had their belly converted.

Differences Among Good Soil

In the parable of the sower, we see that the fruit produced varied. We will talk more about the fruit later in this study. However, for now, we just want to consider the different produce. When seed is planted, much depends on the soil. Some soil has the ability to produce much, some has the ability to produce little. This reveals more to us about the power of the gospel. The gospel does great things in the lives of men. The fruit produced from a particular person to some extent depends on the person, and the one gospel has the power to meet all the needs of those different people. In the parable of the talents we see each man being given the responsibility that he could handle. However, to those that were faithful, more was given. When the seed is planted in good soil, it will produce fruit. If that person remains faithful, then the Lord will increase that person’s

The Seed

ability to bear. All done by the same gospel!

Seed Produces Proportionately

In II Corinthians 9, Paul speaks to the brethren about sowing. In this instance he is specifically speaking with regard to an offering to help the church in Jerusalem, but we learn sowing principles that apply in other areas.

1. Preparation (vs 4)
2. Seed must be sown bountifully (vs 6)
3. Seed must be sown cheerfully (vs 7)
4. Seed is supplied by God (vs 10)
5. Produce is multiplied by God (vs 10)

Many times the effectiveness of the seed is choked out, not by the quality of the soil, but by the lack of faith in the one sowing. If the sower does not have faith, then he will sow but a little seed. However, the sower who realizes the power and potential of the seed will sow it bountifully. The more we sow, the more will be produced. Also, as we noted from the parable of the talents, if we sow to our full potential, then our potential will be increased.

Notice also in this passage that Paul gives the Corinthians the ultimate example of a sower, God. God sows the seed of goodness abroad and His righteousness abides forever. He has the great name that He has because of His liberality in goodness. If we will trust in the seed and sow it liberally, we ourselves will not believe the fruit it can produce!

Born Again

In John 3, Jesus was approached by a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus. He understood that the mighty things done by Jesus were indicative of His being from God. The Lord told Nicodemus that he must be born again. This perplexed Nicodemus. He responded with, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus' reply was, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

How then is one born of water and the Spirit? The answer is through the word of God, that is, the seed.

The Seed

I Peter 1:23 reads:

“for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.”

Peter explains that we are born again through the seed, the word of God. It is through the word that faith is produced. (Romans 10:17) It is through the word that we receive the command to turn from our sin. (Acts 2:38) It is through the word that we are instructed to confess Christ. (Acts 8) It is also through the word that we are told to be baptized and thus be raised to walk in newness of life. (Romans 6) Of all the ways that the Lord could have chosen to have us be born anew, He has decided that it be done through the seed, His word.

I John 3:9 says basically the same thing. John tells us that the one who is born of God does what is right because the seed, that is the word, is in them and directs their lives. The person who is of God and possesses the word can be easily spotted, because they are practicing the righteousness that the gospel teaches.

Imperishable

The final thing we will note about the seed is also found in I Peter 1:23. There Peter indicates that the word is imperishable. It does not die or fade away. The word will never change, not for societal or any other reason for all eternity. 2000 years after the word was completed it still has the same potency it had in the first century. If God allows time to continue for another 2000, 10,000 or 1,000,000 years, the gospel will still have the same power to save as it had in the beginning.

The seed is a piece of Heaven that we have in our hands. We live in a world that quickly changes. The world is fading and passing away. It will ultimately be destroyed. However, Heaven is the opposite. It will be perfect forever and never change. If we are there for 10,000 years it will be as bright as the first day we were there. It will never be destroyed. Now consider the word, what is it like? Heaven of course. The Lord said in Luke 21:33 that “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” The gospel will remain forever, will never change, and can not be destroyed. How comforting it is to hold that little piece of Heaven in our hands and go to it as the only source of peace that it is!

Wayside Heart

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13
AND EXODUS 7-14

WHAT DO YOU
THINK ARE SOME
THINGS THAT CAN
CAUSE A PERSON'S
HEART TO
HARDEN?

CAN A HARD
HEART BE
SOFTENED?

DO YOU THINK
THAT ANYONE'S
HEART CAN
BECOME HARD?

WHAT DO YOU
PICTURE WHEN
YOU THINK OF
STIFF-NECKED?

WHAT DO YOU
THINK IT TAKES
FOR A HARD-
HEARTED PERSON
TO CHANGE?

Four Hearts

In the parable of the sower, the Lord sums up the heart of man by giving four different categories. As we have already mentioned, this served two purposes. The first purpose was so people can evaluate the type of heart they have. The second purpose is so the sower can know what they will encounter.

Invariably, when one speaks to people of the world, we encounter people who will look at the four hearts and say, "my heart is none of these." However, we must remember that this categorization of the human heart is not done by man, but by God. Therefore, when the Lord says that there are four types of heart, then we know that everybody falls into one of the four categories.

Let My People Go

When one thinks of a hard heart that is unwilling to accept the word, Pharaoh is the first to come to mind. Throughout the narrative in Exodus we read of Pharaoh's heart being hard. Sometimes the scripture tells us it was done by God, His word, or even the magicians, yet it all comes down to his heart being as such because HE chose for it to be.

"But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go."

-Exodus 8:32

Pharaoh is the best example of that wayside heart. A heart that has been trampled underfoot to the point of being so hard the seed just lays atop it, waiting for birds to pluck it away. In the sower parable, Jesus likens the birds to Satan. Satan loves the hard-hearted. They are easy prey. He can pick the gospel away without fear of it taking root.

Some may contend that Pharaoh repented, therefore his heart was not hard. However, we must note what Samuel

Wayside Heart

says in I Samuel 6:6:

“Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed?”

Samuel explains that there was no penitence on the part of Pharaoh. He only let the people go due to a worldly fear or sorrow. As soon as the people were out of sight and he had time to consider his greed, he was back on their trail. Indeed, the word of God never took root on the hard soil of his heart, but just lay there until Satan removed it.

Hardening

The text in I Samuel 6 clues us in on something that is quite scary. A heart becomes hard. A person is not born with a hard heart. Therefore, any heart can become hard depending on that person's reaction to time and circumstance. The Philistines did not learn as easily as the Egyptians did. They were both hard-hearted, but at least when God dealt harshly with the Egyptians, they had enough sense to submit themselves to His request. Yet, the Philistines were hard-hearted to the point that they were not doing the obvious. Send the cart back to its people.

Have you ever seen a small child fight against authority? When you try to take something from them they should not have, they will defiantly try to hang on to it and stiffen themselves up. The Bible tells us that when adults harden their hearts, it is a similar childish activity. In II Chronicles 36, we are given the account of King Zedekiah. After Nebuchadnezzar removed Jehoiachin from Judah, he placed Zedekiah to reign in his place. This was during the time of Jeremiah the prophet. However, even though Jeremiah was telling Zedekiah the will of God and Zedekiah had promised Nebuchadnezzar that he would rule Judah faithfully, the scripture says at verse 13 that he:

“also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.”

Indeed, God likens hard-heartedness to the neck-stiffening we can witness in a small child. Hard-heartedness is a result of defiance.

Unfortunately, this tendency of the Jew did not end during the time of Jeremiah and Zedekiah. In Acts 7 we read of Stephen's defense before the Jews. As he brings his sermon to a close, he does so by calling the men “stiff-necked and uncircumcised”. Both of these terms relate to a hardened heart.

Wayside Heart

Uncircumcised Heart

In Jeremiah 9:26 Jeremiah mentions that “all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.” The house of Israel had no excuse. They were the chosen people of God. He had revealed His will to them and they should have been able to see that the Lord desired “compassion, not sacrifice”. However, the people continued in their fleshly manner and were ultimately destroyed because of it.

Paul likens our conversion to a circumcision. He says in Colossians 2:11 that conversion is the “removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ”. This is how the circumcised men to whom Stephen was speaking could be called uncircumcised although in the flesh they were circumcised. They were fleshly and would not subject themselves to God.

Stiff-necked

Stephen also calls them stiff-necked. As we mentioned, this references child-like behavior. When we look at Acts 7:51, Stephen says as much.

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.”

Being stiff-necked is to resist. Once again, it is defiance. These men were defying the Holy Spirit. They did this by resisting the word of God, the seed. Just as Pharaoh did all those years ago, these men resisted God’s word. It also was not confined to these men, but was a generational problem.

One Must Choose

It has been said that the same sun hardens clay and melts wax. The seed forces a person to choose. In Acts 19:9 we find Paul preaching to Jews in the synagogue. They were hearing the same gospel at the same time. However, some were accepting it while others “were becoming hardened and disobedient”. These that were hard-hearted were speaking evil of the Way and causing distress to the new converts. Paul had to withdraw from teaching in the synagogue and find another place to reason with the people. The gospel will bring people to a decision today revealing the heart of the person. Those that are hard-hearted will become more so and resist the word, being disobedient.

How does hardening happen?

Hardening of the heart can happen via a number of different avenues. However, it all comes back to sin. The Hebrew writer says at 3:13 the following:

Wayside Heart

“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In this particular instance he is talking about a Christian who becomes hard-hearted. Yes, even a Christian’s heart can change to this wayside state and they be lost. However, sin does the same thing to those of the world. Some people, due to the various sins they experience and their regard for the word of God are hardened toward it and not willing to listen. They simply have no interest in the word of God. Consider the following characteristics of the wayside heart:

1. Disinterested Ears
2. Heart Can’t Be Penetrated
3. Follow After the First Thing Offered By Satan
4. No Effort Is Ever Exerted Toward Spirituality.

The wayside heart is, no doubt, the most difficult to change. Paul told Timothy of a seared conscience. (I Timothy 4:2) This is a conscience that has fallen victim to sin and no longer wants to hear the sweet message of the gospel. The ears are disinterested, therefore the heart can not be penetrated.

Change

One thing the word of God makes abundantly clear is that these people who became hard-hearted did so by choice. It was their decision to become wayside, and it must be their decision to be softened. All the sower can hope for is that over time, circumstances may cause the individual to think and be soft so the seed can have an effect. No doubt, one can see the precarious nature of the hard-heart as it is something that is basically left to chance!

As sowers, we need to understand this heart well. Not only because we will encounter it, but also because we can easily end up in this state! If we do not guard against sin, it can deceive and harden us. As such, the Lord tells us that the last state is worse than the first.

“For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”

-II Peter 2:20

Stony Heart

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13
AND II PETER 3

CAN YOU THINK
OF SOME
INSTANCES OF
STONY HEARTS
THAT YOU HAVE
WITNESSED?

DO YOU THINK A
STONY HEART CAN
CHANGE?

HOW DO YOU
DESCRIBE A STONY
HEART?

WHAT ARE SOME
WAYS YOU CAN
THINK OF TO HELP
SOMEONE WITH A
STONY HEART?

IS SOMEONE A
CHRISTIAN WHOSE
STONY HEART HAS
BEEN REVEALED?
WERE THEY EVER A
CHRISTIAN?

Walkways

Summer is a busy time for yard work. It seems that a large part of our time is spent just fighting nature away from our homes. One task that I have found interesting in the past is removing vegetation that has grown over a sidewalk. As time goes by during the winter, a shallow veneer of soil will be deposited on the concrete sidewalk. If that soil happened to have some grass seed in it, the grass would begin to grow right there on the sidewalk. Of course, it is only exploiting the soil on the sidewalk, as it can not grow on stone alone. We know how easy it is to remove from the sidewalk. All that must be done is a shovel scraped across the walk and the vegetation, soil and all, come up easily. So is the stony heart.

The stony heart is one that initially accepts the word. However, the stones have not been removed, so the layer of soil is shallow. The root system is not strong, therefore, as soon as something happens to injure those beginning feelings, that initial zeal, the plant withers away.

A Faith Problem

This type of heart boils down to a problem with faith. The stony heart gladly receives the gospel initially. There is a great zeal, but the slightest affliction or persecution causes the plant to wither. No doubt the saints saw many instances of this heart in the first few centuries. For hundreds of years the church faced persecution. History has recorded the accounts of Christians boldly standing in the face of persecution, even to the death. However, those accounts are recorded because they are of interest. No doubt there were many more that recanted because of a shallow root when the going became tough.

Anchor

An anchor is an object that is used to keep something from moving. The Hebrew writer references anchors in his letter

Stony Heart

at 6:19:

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil...”

The hope that we have in Christ is what holds us fast. A hope of redemption from sins, salvation, immortality, and eternal life with the Savior. In this hope we can place our unwavering faith.

In the same passage, the Hebrew writer says that the Lord who can not lie spoke of two unchangeable things. The first being His purpose.

“the unchangeableness of His purpose” (Hebrews 6:17)

We can have unwavering faith In Him because His purpose does not change. That purpose being the salvation of mankind.

Jesus came with the purpose of seeking and saving the lost. (Luke 19:10) This has been the purpose of God with regard to mankind from the time of the fall in Genesis 3. It is the thread that ties the word of God together, the redemption of mankind. We can trust in God that even if it is another 6000 years before He calls us to Him, His purpose will not have changed. He still will not be “wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

The second unchangeable thing is the oath of God. The Hebrew writer explains that it is impossible for God to lie. Notice that it does not say that God does not lie, it says he can not lie! Since God can not lie, then adding an unchangeable oath to the unchangeableness of His purpose would be a double surety for the follower of God. What grace the Lord has bestowed upon us! Not only did He do wonderful things for us that we do not deserve, He also went out of His way to see to it that there was absolutely no reason for us to distrust Him!

Stony Hearts in the Bible

Persecution is used in the word of God for good and bad. That is, persecution drives some to greater faith and works, while others it shrivels. Those that it shrivels are the ones whose soil is shallow. Notice the people recorded for us in Acts 5:12-13. Here we find people who were looking upon the saints with admiration. The scripture says that they held them in “high esteem”. No doubt they would have loved to join the saints, yet their soil was shallow. Acts 5:13 says that “none of the rest dared to associate with them” due to fear of retribution at the hands of the Jews. Indeed, sometimes a shallow heart stops

Stony Heart

the seed before it even has chance to take root!

Persecution

Our Bible closes before we see any widespread persecution of the saints. There is the persecution that arose after Stephen was stoned, but it was localized. However, there is much discussion in God's word about various local persecutions that were taking place and preparation for a widespread persecution that was to come.

The church at Thessalonica was such a strong group of people that Paul commended them as his crown that he could present to the Lord on the last day. (I Thessalonians 2:19) This church was in its infancy at the time of writing. Paul had only had a short time to spend with them, but he commends them for holding fast in spite of persecution. These were indeed people who had deep soil and a strong root.

The climate of the early church was one that would show a stony heart very quickly. Churches had to endure persecution at the hands of their countrymen, the Jews, and even the Romans. If a person had accepted the gospel but did not have the soil to support it, this would quickly become evident.

Stony Hearts Today

Things are the same today. We still encounter stony hearts. People who accept the gospel joyfully, but when adversity arises, the plant withers. Can you think of some things that may make a stony heart evident and explain why?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Backfilling the Stony Heart

Hearts can change. Sadly, they often do not. What then, can we do to help someone with a stony heart? There are certainly things we can do, however, due to the nature of this heart, the problem does not often become evident until it is too late.

The first thing that we can do with all aliens and new converts, is to do a cost assessment

Stony Heart

with them that gives thorough consideration to the element of persecution and trials. Unfortunately, many today do not think that we undergo persecution or trials as saints. Although it may not be in the same form as it was for the early church, we certainly do. Not only do we certainly, we would likewise be lost without it! Remember James 1. Here he says in verse 12:

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

According to James, without trials we cannot be approved, and without approval we can not receive the crown of life. Indeed, they are for our benefit. Sadly, many new converts have heard too often from the denominational world that becoming a Christian makes all your problems go away. When they find this not to be the case, they become discouraged and fall away. We need to foresee this and try to head it off.

The second thing that needs to be made abundantly clear is that God loves each and every one of us. Not only does He love us, nothing can destroy that love. That includes persecution. Consider Paul’s words at Romans 8:35:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

and again at 8:38:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Lastly, we have to understand that sometimes these heart problems rear their head and there is nothing that we can do. We can speak and try to help, but in the end it is up to the person. The scripture tells us that whosoever wills may come to the Lord. That means anyone, even someone with a stony heart. In other words, sometimes it just takes time for the person to get the stones out of their heart. We need to help them in every way we can. Do not write a stony person off, but continue to admonish them as a brother. (II Thessalonians 3:15) Although they may be out of duty for a time, you never know when they will get their ducks in a row, so to speak, and be ready to come back and serve God.

Thorny Heart

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13
AND HEBREWS 13.

WHAT ARE SOME
THINGS THAT YOU
CONSIDER AS
THORNS?

HOW ARE THE
THORNY AND
STONY ALIKE?

WHAT IS THE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE
STONY/THORNY
HEART AND THE
WAYSIDE HEART?

WHAT IMPACT ON
PAUL DO YOU
THINK DEMAS
DESERTING HIM
HAD?

WHAT IMPACT ON
THE BRETHREN DO
YOU THINK A
“DEMAS” OF TODAY
HAS?

HOW CAN WE
HELP THORNY
HEARTS?

Abundance

The thorny heart is arguably the most well-represented of the three types of bad heart in the Bible. We seem to encounter them very often in God's word, not to mention due to the climate of the day, we see them very often in our daily lives. This heart is tied very closely to materialism, and therefore is the great battle of our time. As we preach the gospel to the lost, we can expect to encounter this heart more often than not.

Demas

When we think of the love of the world our thoughts immediately go to Demas. In Paul's travels he came to depend upon certain brethren. Some, such as Titus and Timothy he even called his sons. Paul drew great encouragement from these men. They accompanied him in his travel and his work. They assisted in his benevolent endeavors such as carrying funds to Jerusalem, his edification endeavors such as building churches after he had planted them, and his evangelistic endeavors such as his missionary journeys.

One such man was Demas. When Paul wrote the letter to Colossae, he says that Luke and Demas sent their greetings. Luke was indispensable to Paul, and apparently Demas was quite helpful also. We also find Demas sending his greetings to Philemon in verse 24. Unfortunately, this would not remain the case. When we turn to II Timothy 4:9, Paul writes the following:

“Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...”

Here was a man who had been faithfully aiding Paul for some time. However, hidden in his heart was the seed of thorns. It took some time, but they finally took root and

Thorny Heart

choked out the word and he deserted the cause. The wayside heart is at least honest. It does not accept the seed whatsoever. The stony and thorny heart are of a different type. They appear to be the good and honest heart for a time, but external things make the deception known eventually. How sad this was for Paul. He has explained to Timothy that his time of departure had come, yet due to the thorns in the heart of Demas, he was no use to Paul at this critical time.

Judas

Judas is another good example of such a person. Here we see a man who had a problem. He was material minded and susceptible to greed. However, he accepted the gospel as did the others. For a significant time all appeared well. Yet, eventually the thorns in his heart took root and he was overcome. It choked out the word.

Judas stands out in sharp contrast to Peter. Peter is another example of someone who could have very easily been choked out by the cares of the world. He was concerned with appearances. As Peter was being overcome with the “worry of the world”, being fearful that he would be implicated along with the Lord, he denied Him three times. However, we have here a good example of someone who was able to weed his heart and overcome the thorns. Judas went away and hanged himself, he was overcome by the thorns while Peter persisted and overcame.

Worry of the World

There are some things in this life that are worth worrying about and some things that are not worth worrying about. Read the verses under the blanks and write down what the scripture says is not something for which a Christian should worry.

1. _____
(Matthew 6:25-34)

2. _____
(Matthew 10:26-28)

3. _____
(I Peter 3:14)

4. _____
(Philippians 1:13-14)

Thorny Heart

The worry of the world is a fleshly thing that is prompted by our fleshly man. However, Paul told the Colossian brethren that the earthly man was to be put to death. The Lord has made it abundantly clear that we should not worry over things of the world.

However, there is a type of worry or fear that we should have. What are some things that the following verses say should concern us?

1. _____
(Matthew 10:26-28)

2. _____
(Ephesians 5:21)

3. _____
(Galatians 4:11)

4. _____
(Philippians 2:12)

In other words, we are not to fear fleshly things of this world because it does not accomplish our spiritual purposes. However, we are to be concerned with the spiritual. There are spiritual things which we should fear and should cause us worry or concern.

Deceitfulness of Riches

The second thorn bush that is listed by the Lord that can choke out the Word is the “deceitfulness of riches”. Paul words the Lord’s admonition of Matthew 13 in the following way at I Timothy 6:10:

“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.”

Indeed the love of money is a root of the thorn bush. Paul describes this love for riches as a wandering away from the faith. People wander away from things because of distractions. The “deceitfulness of riches” is a very effective distraction in the tool belt of Satan. People long for the false promises of wealth, only to find themselves at a destination other than eternal life with a list of wealth’s unfulfilled promises. The final insult of loving money is found in the statement, “pierced **themselves** with many a pang.” After a person realizes that wealth was not able to fulfill them, they do not even

Thorny Heart

have anyone to blame for a wasted life but themselves!

Weeding the Garden

As mentioned, the thorny heart is problematic as is the stony heart in that they both often do not show up until after a person has been baptized into Christ. This leaves the brethren to do damage control and try to help the thorny brother or sister to remove the thorns. However, if we are careful to teach aliens about the four types of heart, they can sometimes identify their heart as being thorny ahead of time and might can be helped to deal with it.

The person with the thorny heart must first be taught what are valid things to fear and what are invalid things to fear. Everyone is going to struggle with realigning this with the biblical picture. However, we must teach the great importance of understanding what the Lord has promised and what he has not. We must teach that if we fear God as we should, the things of this world will pale in comparison and not be the large concerns that they once were. When God has promised our needs, the worry of striving to provide all our wants does not seem all that important. When God has told us the importance of working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, the fleshly things that once caused fear and trembling are no longer the concern they once were.

Secondly, the alien or ailing Christian must come to understand wealth. A certain amount of money is necessary to function in this life. However, when people cross over from seeing it as a necessary tool to seeing it as the end itself, this is perilous to one's soul. Paul tells Timothy that elders must be "free from the love of money". Unfortunately, people sometimes think that this admonition is only given to elders. The Hebrew writer records at 13:5 the following:

“Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you”

We all must be content. This is often interpreted as we need to be content with the stuff that God has already given us. Yet, the writer is saying more. He says to be content with food and clothing as the Lord instructed in Matthew 6. The writer is also explaining that it should be easy to be content with having a God who will not desert or forsake us. We must remember, not only do we serve a God who has promised us our needs, He has likewise shown us that He can not lie and is not going anywhere! (Hebrews 6)

Good & Honest Heart

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13,
II KINGS 21-23, AND
II CHRONICLES 33-36

WHAT EXAMPLES
OF THE GOOD
HEART CAN YOU
FIND IN THE BIBLE?

CAN YOU THINK
OF EXAMPLES OF
PEOPLE WITH A
GOOD HEART THAT
YOU HAVE
ENCOUNTERED IN
YOUR LIFE?

DO YOU THINK
THAT ANYONE
CAN HAVE A GOOD
HEART?

WHAT DOES
JOSIAH TEACH US
ABOUT A GOOD
HEART?

DO YOU THINK
THAT GOOD
HEARTS ARE IN THE
MAJORITY OR
MINORITY AND TO
WHAT EXTENT?

Not All Bad

Thankfully, every heart is not bad. There is that silver lining in the cloud that the sower can look to. There is the occasional person that has a good and honest heart. This heart was ready to accept the word, they took it in, and it produced a great plant that goes on to produce fruit. This is the heart that the sower looks forward to and works for.

When we consider the Bible, it is really a record of good and honest hearts. It is about the heroes, men and women who had good soil and the command of God was accepted by them and sprang up into a great plant. The record is largely about the fruit that was produced by such people. Indeed, some produced little fruit while others produced great fruit, but God had at each point in history a fruit producer. The Bible itself is written by these fruit producers. Just consider the fruit produced by those 40 individuals who wrote the Old and New Testaments. A Book written by fruit producers primarily about fruit producers!

Josiah

Josiah is an interesting character in our Bible. He is a person who, against all odds, ended up being one of the best kings that Israel or Judah had ever seen. We find the account of Josiah in II Kings 21-23 and II Chronicles 33-36.

The first thing that we note about Josiah is that his goodness was prophesied by the Lord. There are two prophecies in the word of God that are very specific. One is when Isaiah prophesied of the king who would release Judah. He not only prophesied that it would happen, but even the name of the king who would do it, Cyrus. The other is in regard to Josiah. In I Kings 13 we find the account of the young prophet who was to cry against the altar at Bethel. He did so along with the prophecy that a king of the house of David by the name of Josiah would desecrate that altar. Indeed, that is

Good & Honest Heart

one of the things done by Josiah as he was busy reforming the nation. (II Kings 23:16)

Josiah is of note because of his youth and dedication to God even though it was very unlikely that he would ever come to the truth. Answer the following questions from the text about Josiah:

1. Who was Josiah's father? Grandfather? _____
2. What kind of men were they? _____
3. What kind of heart did Josiah have? _____
4. What do you think caused Josiah to search for the way of God? _____

5. How would you rate Josiah's zeal for the Lord? _____
6. What fruit did Josiah bear for the Lord? _____

7. What ultimately happened to the people? _____
8. Why was Josiah spared? _____

The ultimate lesson that we learn from Josiah is that a good and honest heart can be found in the most unlikely places. No doubt one would look at his upbringing and father figures and think that no good could come of him. However, it is important to note that sowing is not based upon our estimation of the person, but it is the Lord that looks into the hearts of man. (Hebrews 4:13, I Samuel 16:7)

Statistics

It is interesting to note that statistically speaking, things did not look good for Josiah. Of all the kings of Israel, none were good. Of all the kings of Judah, only four were good, inclusive of Josiah. The chances of him being a good king were not likely. Yet, he was!

Good & Honest Heart

When we consider the parable of the sower, this reality is there also. Just think that of the four hearts, only one is conducive to producing fruit. The others either are not hospitable to the Word to begin with, or they cause it to wither later on. The sower would only encounter a 25 percent chance at best of coming across good soil. Of course, the parable is not meant to be taken literally mathematically speaking. However, one can easily see and say that of the people that we preach to, the majority will not be receptive or conducive to bearing fruit. Jesus said as much when he described the different paths in Matthew 7. Remember, there will be few that will find that strait and narrow path.

Some men in the church have kept track of how many must be spoken to in order to gain one convert. The numbers basically come down to 10 percent. That is, of 100 people you speak to about the gospel, you are likely to study with 10. Of that 10, you are likely to convert 1. We can easily see that sowing the seed is hard work.. We are going to have to speak to many people so the few can be saved. Sometimes that number is a little better, sometimes a little worse, but overall, that is the amount of work that is needed to win one over to Christ. That is work necessary to reach that good and honest heart in the midst of the hard, stony, and thorny soil that is so widespread.

Not Immediately Apparent

James said, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” Sometimes the heart of a person is not immediately apparent. Not only is it not apparent to the sower, but sometimes the person hearing the truth does not fully understand their heart. This is why the sower must take time to explain the hearts to the people so they can evaluate their situation.

However, as the Lord said at Luke 6:44, “each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.” A person can not hide their heart forever. The heart will be made known. Therefore, just as it takes time for heart problems to show on occasion, it can also take some time before we start seeing the fruit of the good heart by which to judge it as such. So, the sower must be busy nurturing the new convert so that they will have the knowledge necessary to produce fruit.

Assayer?

There is one thing that this parable makes abundantly clear, we are not assayers. An assayer is someone who analyzes soil to determine its mineral content and makeup. Although the sower is looking for the good and honest heart, we are not equipped with

Good & Honest Heart

the ability to read a person's heart. All a person can do is look at the fruit that someone bears to determine if their heart is good or bad. Sometimes that is abundantly clear. However, as with the stony and thorny heart, by all appearances that person's heart was honest to begin with. Yet, over time the problems become apparent. As we can see, determining soil is a tricky business that is best left up to God.

Apollos

When I think of a good and honest heart, my mind turns to Apollos. In Acts 18:24 we are introduced to him. He came to Ephesus and was preaching the gospel, yet he only was "up to speed" as far as John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquilla heard him, they lovingly took him aside and proclaimed the gospel to him more perfectly. Upon hearing this and being converted to the way of the Lord, he began to mightily speak the gospel in its complete form. What an example of a good and honest heart. Not only was he doing what was good from the beginning, when corrected, he accepted it and immediately applied it.

Great fruit was born from this man. He went on to Corinth after having been in Ephesus and proclaimed the gospel there. No doubt he had a great impact on the brethren at Corinth, for in the first letter to them, Paul had to explain that Apollos was not crucified for them. They could not be "Apollocite Christians". Although their factious ways were unacceptable to God, they certainly speak volumes about the kind of man Apollos was and the influence that he had.

Also, thrown into this mix, we see another great example of people with good hearts in Acts 19:1-7. While Apollos went to Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus. Here he encountered a group of people who knew nothing but John's baptism, just as was the case with Apollos. After Paul explained the way more perfectly to them, they immediately accepted the word and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Before and After

The sower preaches the gospel hoping that it will fall on good soil. When that happens, it is indeed a blessed event. The gospel also tells us that after conversion we must be careful to maintain that open, honest heart and not be hardened by sin. Let us always be open and willing to evaluate how we walk. There may be changes that need to be made, and may we have the mind to do so, as those good brethren in Ephesus.

Hearts Can Change

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13
AND HEBREWS 3

DO YOU BELIEVE
THAT HEARTS CAN
CHANGE?

CAN YOU THINK
OF EXAMPLES OF
HEARTS CHANGING
IN THE BIBLE?

CAN YOU THINK
OF EXAMPLES YOU
HAVE WITNESSED
IN YOUR LIFE OF
PEOPLE'S HEARTS
CHANGING?

WHICH BAD HEART
DO YOU THINK IS
THE HARDEST TO
CHANGE AND
WHY?

WHAT ARE SOME
WAYS YOU CAN
THINK OF THAT WE
COULD USE TO
HELP THOSE WITH
OR IN DANGER OF
HAVING, HEART
TROUBLE?

Hearts Can Change

I have actually heard Christians say that people do not change! I certainly hope that they do. The entire gospel rests upon the fact that people can and do change.

A great disservice has been done to the gospel by Calvinism. It has even infiltrated the Lord's church in some ways. It needs to be searched for and rooted out. John Calvin taught in his TULIP doctrine that a person is "Totally Hereditarily Depraved". That means that we inherit the sin of Adam and there is nothing we can do about it. Not only that, we are so wicked that we can do nothing to change that as there is nothing good in us. Therefore, the only way we can be saved is if God irresistibly reaches into our heart and changes it to good. With this doctrine is the removal of responsibility for the person. They can do nothing to change, nor can they do anything to stop the Lord from changing them. Thus, they believe that a person can not change their heart.

Sadly, many brethren have accepted this lie also. They believe that if someone has a bad heart, they can not change that. However, inconsistently they believe that someone with a good heart **can** change that. The truth is, the Bible puts the heart changing responsibility, whether for the good or bad, upon the person.

Good to Bad

The Hebrew writer in Hebrews 3:13 warns about the ability of a heart to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

We need to remember as we read this that the writer is writing to Christians, people with good hearts. People who had accepted the word, yet were in danger of falling victim to sin and being lost. Certainly no one who was once right,

Hearts Can Change

but has been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin can go to heaven. They will be lost. As a matter of fact, he says in the preceding verse that they could develop an “evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.” Obviously one can not fall from a place they never were. He is speaking about people who were saved but their heart was hardened. They decided to believe in the lies of Satan regarding sin and abandon the truth of the Lord. Thus he admonishes in verse 14, “we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” A sower must be careful to guard their own heart as they encounter various people in the line of duty so as not to be overtaken by the world.

Of course, sometimes, before conversion a good heart can become bad. Someone who may have listened to the gospel weeks, months, or years prior has been hardened by the world to a point where they are a wayside heart. What are some things that you think could harden the alien?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What about some things that can harden the Christian?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Do you think that different times in a person’s life can take a heart that was once good soil and place thorns or stones in it, or do you think the stones or thorn seeds were always there? Explain giving scripture references where applicable.

Hearts Can Change

Bad to Good

Thankfully, we also see in scripture that bad hearts can become good hearts. This is certainly true of the Christian. The Corinthian brethren are excellent examples of this.

The Corinthian church had many problems. Paul dealt with them all masterfully, chapter by chapter, problem by problem. He even wrote a second letter to them to tie up some loose ends. The church had problems with faction, immorality, women's roles, spiritual gifts, order in worship, and corruption of the Lord's Supper to name a few. Yet, he still calls them brethren. They were still in the process of eradicating their fleshly man.

Notice I Corinthians 3:1-3:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ...for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

These brethren were having trouble leaving the things of the world. Paul wrote this letter to them to answer some questions they had and to deal with some heinous things that had been reported to him. However, it is obvious that Paul knew they could change from bad to good and live fruitful lives as followers of God.

Of course, these brethren were behind the curve. As we looked at earlier, the Thessalonian brethren were shining examples of how saints could and should act. After a brief period of time with Paul, they left their worldliness and were excelling among the saints to the point that Paul was using them as an example!

This is true of the saints, and it is likewise true of the alien. Take for instance someone who hears the gospel in their youth. They may be full of thorn seed, that is, very materialistic. However, as time goes by, many people get the desire for things of the world under control. That no longer becomes such a factor for them. At this time, they may be willing to hear the gospel that once would have been choked. Consider someone who in their youth was hardened against the word by some denomination they attended that was greedy. However, as time goes by, they see others that are Christians who are not greedy. They may be softened to the point that the gospel will reach their heart. Hearts can change!

No?

This brings us to the next point. No does not always mean no. Sometimes no just means

Hearts Can Change

“not right now, but try me again in a few months.” Certainly we have seen examples of someone who when approached about the gospel the first time says that they want nothing to do with it. However, when approached by someone else later maybe in a different way, they are then ready and willing to hear it. The point is, do not write someone off just because they told you no once upon a time. The church is filled with people who would not hear the gospel in the beginning, yet at a later time were willing to listen.

As sowers of the seed, we need to be persistent. If we talk with someone that is not at a point where they are willing to listen, just back away and give them space. Later, at another opportune time, try to speak with them again. You just may be surprised with the results.

Assisting

Paul tells the Corinthian church that he planted and Apollos watered. (I Corinthians 3:6) No doubt Paul is primarily talking about their crossing paths in Acts 18-19. As Paul is going from Corinth to Ephesus, Apollos is doing the opposite. Apollos arrived at Corinth in just enough time to water what Paul had just planted. However, Paul is not saying that his whole job was to plant churches, for the Corinthian letter itself is example of Paul “watering” that church.

Considering this, we can see that the sower also has responsibility in watering. The sower must help soil be prepared for the seed and the sower must also help tend soil that has received the seed. Therefore, we all have responsibility in aiding soil.

We need to have plans for this. How can I help the alien with heart problems to correct them and be ready for the seed? Sometimes it will just take time if the good Lord allows. However, sometimes some simple teaching from God’s word can help a person with a heart problem get past it and be ready to accept the seed.

Also, the sower must help soil that has already received the seed. Too often we see examples of people being “converted” and then turned loose. Then we look around after they fall away and blame it solely on their heart. While this is the case sometimes, there are also instances where we have not adequately provided watering services for the soil. A farmer is careful to rotate crops to protect the soil that is so valuable to him. In the same way sowers must be careful to protect soil so that in due time the Lord can increase it!

Satan and His Kingdom

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13
AND 1 PETER

CAN YOU THINK
OF A PHRASE IN
THE BIBLE THAT IS
OFTEN MISAPPLIED
TO SATAN TO
EXPLAIN HIS
ORIGIN?

W H A T
EXPLANATIONS OF
THE ORIGIN OF
SATAN HAVE YOU
HEARD?

WHEN YOU THINK
OF SATAN, HOW
DO YOU PICTURE
HIM?

WHAT ARE SOME
THINGS WE LEARN
ABOUT SATAN
FROM THE BOOK
OF JOB?

WHAT ARE SOME
THINGS YOU THINK
OF WHEN READING
THE PARABLE OF
THE TARES IN
MATTHEW 13?

Satan's Origin

We do not have any information in the word of God regarding the origin of Satan. Many teach that He is a fallen angel that rebelled against God. However, the Bible reveals no such thing.

There are a couple of things that we can deduce about the origin of Satan. First of all, God created Him. John 1 tells us that nothing that came into being did so apart from God. He created all things. Therefore, since Satan is not God, he was created by Him.

The second thing that we can deduce about the origin of Satan is that he was originally good, but chose to rebel. James tell us that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights. (James 1) Our Father is the creator of things that are good, not things that are bad. When we look back at the creation account of Genesis, we see that everything God created was good. He ultimately said in review of His entire creation on the sixth day that it was "very good". Thus, since Satan is created and God only creates good, we know that at one time Satan was good.

The fact that Satan rebelled at some point in the past is clear. However, the scripture does not tell us when that event took place, nor does it reveal anything else about that event. Also, the scripture does not tell us what type of being Satan is. Many think him to be a fallen angel, but the scripture reveals no such thing. Actually, it explains that this could not be the case. Jude 6 states:

"and angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day."

This passage explains that wicked angels are kept in prison until the judgment day. Yet, Satan is not kept in prison, but as Peter puts it, he "prowls about like a roaring lion". This

Satan and His Kingdom

would seem to prove that Satan could not be an angel. At the very least it proves that Satan is in some way different from the angels that abandoned their proper abode.

Boogeyman?

One thing about Satan is perfectly clear. He is not some sort of spiritual boogeyman that the Bible uses to scare people into doing what is right. He is not some caricature of a person who wears a red jumpsuit, has a bifurcated tongue, a tail, and carries around a pitchfork like is seen in cartoons and sitcoms. Satan is a real being that literally walks about the earth attempting to lead mankind astray. Not only does he attempt it, he is quite proficient at it, to the extent that the majority of people will follow the wide road that leads to destruction. (Matthew 7)

Remember Job. As we are given a glimpse into the throne of Heaven on a day when the Lord had called the heavenly beings to Himself, we see Satan. Not much is said of him from the fall of man until the book of Job, but we see that he is alive and well. God asks Satan where he has been. Satan's reply was, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." Satan was milling around on the earth harming mankind. This desire to harm man becomes painfully clear in the chapters that follow this encounter with God. Satan brings Job to as low a point as possible just to see if he will turn his back on God. Satan should certainly scare us. However, if we think he is just a scary symbol and not a being that is actively working against us, we underestimate his ability and we misunderstand the word of God.

Hardworking

Sadly, Satan's work ethic is much better than many of the household of faith! Peter says at I Peter 5:8 that "your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." The very word "Satan" means adversary. Every step we take as Christians, Satan pushes against us to try and prevent it. He fights against all that is good and he is relentless in this endeavor. He works on mankind every hour of every day for a person's entire life.

Do we see the problem with just trusting in a few hours a week worshipping God and thinking on spiritual matters? Satan is not so lazy. He is consumed with desire to destroy what is good. If all we can muster is a few hours a week to think about the spiritual matters that are loathsome to Satan, then we have lost before we ever begin!

Satan and His Kingdom

Turf

We must make no mistake. As sowers of the seed, we are on Satan's turf. There is another sower parable in Matthew 13, the parable of the tares. In this parable the owner of the field plants good seed, but the enemy plants tares among the good seed and they both grow up together. This is the way of the world. While the sower is trying to do what is good and right, Satan is going right along throwing every possible obstacle and stumbling block into the way of the Lord's work. (Matthew 13:41) The Lord allows this for a time so as not to harm the righteous in the judgment. Remember, God is allowing those who would be good time to do so as stated at II Peter 3:9:

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

However, at the end of time, the Lord is going to sort the good from the bad. The wicked will be cast into the lake of fire, but the righteous will go on to be with Him in Heaven for all eternity.

Satan is going to protect his own. The sower can not expect to go into the world where the wicked are and suffer no recourse. Satan will do everything in his power to keep the sower from winning over people of the world, regardless of the type of heart they have. If they have a hard heart, Satan will try to keep it as such. If the heart is stony, he will try to thwart any effort to backfill that heart. If the heart is thorny, he will try to cause the thorns to grow. If the heart is good and honest, Satan is going to work extra hard at hardening it. If we underestimate Satan and do not plan ahead for his attempts to thwart us, he can certainly render us ineffective in sowing the seed.

Not only will Satan work against efforts to convert, he will work against efforts to water those that have been converted. Satan has a plan. This is made perfectly clear in our New Testament. Satan tried firstly to prevent the Lord from leaving infancy as evidenced by the plot of Herod to kill all Bethlehemite children under the age of two. When this did not work, Satan tried to destroy the Lord's influence with the people. When this did not work, he tried to put the Lord to death. The Lord dying only accomplished the purpose of God. Yet, Satan did not quit. He then decided that he would destroy the infant church. However, it flourished. The harder he worked to silence it, the faster and greater it spread. The Bible ends with a picture of the great persecution that Satan was to bring on the church, with the end result being that the church would never be destroyed and his persecution would only result in greater holiness. Jesus wins this time and every time. However, we must fully understand the tenacity of Satan. If he can not accomplish his

Satan and His Kingdom

goals this generation, he has no problem waiting until another generation comes to work on them. If we better understand his nature and how he works against us, we will be much more successful in sowing the seed.

What are some ways that Satan may try to thwart our evangelistic efforts?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are some strategies we can use to keep Satan's influence to a minimum and the influence of the Bible to its maximum in evangelism?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pray

We can not overstate the role of prayer in evangelism. When a big project is to be done in a corporation, there is much conferencing that must be done with the "higher-ups" to make sure that it is done in the best way possible and in the way they want it done. The Lord has commanded that we sow the seed. So, we must be sure and go to Him in prayer often to ask for His wisdom in so doing (James 1) and opportunities for it to happen.

Paul told the Thessalonian brethren at 3:1 to pray for he and his companions. His desire was for the rapid spread of the gospel and the glorification of God thereby. This verse shows us that going to God in prayer is an integral part of fighting against Satan and winning lost souls from his kingdom. The Hebrew writer tells us to "boldly approach the throne of grace". We can certainly boldly approach the throne in regard to this because we know without doubt that seeking and saving the lost is the primary mission of God in relation to man. Pray without ceasing! (I Thessalonians 5:17)

God and His Kingdom

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW
13, ISAIAH 2,
DANIEL 2, JOEL 2,
AND ACTS 2

WHAT ARE SOME
DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN THE
NATURE OF GOD
AND SATAN?

WHAT IS GOD'S
MISSION IN
RESPECT TO
MANKIND?

WHAT DO YOU
THINK IS GOD'S
ROLE IN BAD
THINGS THAT
HAPPEN, IF ANY?

HOW IMPORTANT
DO YOU THINK IT
IS TO TEACH THE
ALIEN ABOUT THE
NATURE OF GOD?
WHY?

Alpha and Omega

In the book of Revelation, the Lord is referenced as the Alpha and the Omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the beginning and the end. Although we do not have any information other than what we can deduce about the origin of Satan, we can at least understand how he could come to be. However, God is something that our mind can not comprehend.

Our physical mind is limited. We can not picture eternity because we are limited by time. We can not envision a being who can be everywhere because we are limited by space. The beauty of Heaven and the church are explained to us by word pictures such as gold and jewels because those are the most valuable and beautiful things that are minds can comprehend. Yet, to think that these things are actually gold and jewels does injustice to the true beauty and nature of them.

This is so with God. We can not comprehend a being that has no origin. He has always been. He always will be. Our mind can not wrap itself around the concept that we will always be, let alone that God has always been.

Creator of All

John 1 tells us about God and His creation of all things. We see the Godhead taking their roles, the father as the architect, the son as the carpenter, and the Holy Spirit as the finisher. In creation, God spoke things into existence, John 1 says that the Son brought them forth, and we see the Holy Spirit over the waters in Genesis 1.

Until we understand God as the creator and therefore the owner of all, we can not completely understand His total authority, nor can we effectively teach others of it. God has all authority, not because He took it, but because it is His by

God and His Kingdom

right and anyone can logically see that. When someone creates something, it belongs to them. They therefore have authority to do with it as they will. God created the universe and therefore could set the physical laws that govern it the way He wanted them to be. The universe obeys His command because as His creation it must.

However, this also shows us the difference between man and inanimate objects or animals. These things were not created with free will. Man has the ability to choose whether they will serve God or not. An object can only obey the laws of physics and an animal can only obey the instincts with which God endowed it, but man can choose. When we consider this, we realize that we are the only things in the universe that can reject Him and go against His will! So, we see that God does not need our service to Him for God has need of nothing (Acts 17:25), but He desires it because we are the only thing that chooses to do so in the universe and it is what is best for His creation.

This fact brings the statement of the Lord to the Jews into focus. Remember earlier in the study when we looked at Matthew 9:13? It states:

“But go and learn what this means, “I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,” for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The Lord wants our heart. He did not need the animal sacrifices nor did he desire them. The ancients wrote of how their gods swarmed through the smoke of the offerings as flies. They actually thought that their gods commanded sacrifice because they liked the smell of burnt flesh! However, God tells us that the sacrifices were not what He desired. This is true of the sacrifices that we offer today. God certainly does not want me to sing because my voice is without equal in the world! He wants our compassionate heart. Not sacrifice for sacrifice sake, but sacrifice as a sign that our heart is devoted to Him!

Not Burdensome

Jesus gives the beautiful invitation in Matthew 11 that we often quote. He says that the yoke of the Lord is easy and His burden is light. He does not expect things of us that we are incapable of doing. His yoke is easy and it is even what is best for us as He says that the yoke-bearers will receive rest. Taking up the reigns and working in His vineyard is not difficult and is what is best for us. No doubt we will be more effective sowers if we fully understand the nature of God, His will for us, and His kingdom. Not only that, the people who hear the gospel will benefit greatly from a better understanding of God. Remember, the majority of the world operates on false information, and therefore a false impression, of God, what He does, and how He works.

God and His Kingdom

The Kingdom

Jesus came to this earth to set up His kingdom. Not only did He come to do it, He accomplished it. Much of the world operates on the false premise that God did not accomplish His purpose. Of course, as already mentioned, we serve the God of the universe who has power over all His creation. No one can or ever has thwarted the plan of God, nor will they ever. No, it is as Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world". Jesus never came with the purpose of setting up an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. Answer the following questions.

1. What things do we learn about the kingdom from Isaiah 2? _____

2. What things do we learn about the kingdom from Daniel 2? _____

3. What things do we learn about the kingdom from Joel 2? _____

4. What do we learn about the kingdom from Acts 2? _____

5. What verses after Acts 2 can you find that would show the existence of the kingdom in the first century?

A kingdom is a thing that is hard for an American to understand. We live in a country where we elect our leaders, from local offices all the way up to the leader of the entire country. We live in a democratic republic where we elect people to represent us in the decision making process. As a matter of fact, many do not even understand our government and can not understand why everything is not put to a vote. That is a pure democracy and is extremely inefficient and ineffective. If we have a hard time

God and His Kingdom

understanding our own government, we can see why people have difficulty understanding the nature of a monarchy, with which they have no experience.

In the illustration of a kingdom, it is important to note that things are necessary to a kingdom. It must have a king, citizens, land, and law. The kingdom of Heaven has all those things. Jesus is the king (I Timothy 1:17), citizens are Christians (Ephesians 2:19), the land is the heart (Hebrews 8:10), and the law is the Bible (Galatians 6:2), specifically the New Testament.

When we teach the kingdom of Heaven to people, which is what proclaiming the gospel is, it is important that the nature of God's kingdom is explained. As a monarchy, Christ has all authority. Nothing is voted on. For all decisions we must go to the word of God, that is, ask "What does the scripture say?" (Galatians 4:30)

When we sow the seed, people need to understand exactly what they are getting into. What will I have to give up? All authority I thought I had. What will I have to do? All that the King has asked of me. How will I know what He desires? By studying to show myself approved. (II Timothy 2:15)

What are some things that we learn about the kingdom from the parables found in Matthew 13?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

There is great hope that can be given to those that we are teaching by explaining the eternal nature of the kingdom. This is especially true when we are in hard times in our own country. We do not know from day to day what the markets will look like, what freedoms we will have, or who will be in power. Yet, in Christ's kingdom, we are citizens of something that is pure, undefiled, and will not fade away. The gates of Hades can not prevail against it. (Matthew 16)

Bearing Fruit

IN PREPARATION

READ MATTHEW 13

NOW AT THE CLOSE OF THIS STUDY, HOW HAVE YOUR IDEAS REGARDING SEED SOWING CHANGED?

WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENT TYPES OF FRUIT THAT WE CAN BEAR IN REGARD TO EVANGELISM?

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE TYPE OF EXAMPLE OFTEN SET BY BRETHREN IN THE WORLD?

HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM DO YOU THINK THERE IS WITH BRETHREN BEING ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL, NOT IN DEED, BUT IN PRACTICE?

Abundant Life

John states at 10:10:

“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”

This verse really sums up what the Lord wants for us. We talk about the work that He requires and what we must give up for Him, but it all must be seen through the view of it being for our good. It is what is best for us. He wants us to have life, but to have it abundantly. He wants us to have peace in this life, but He wants it to be the peace that passes all comprehension. He wants us to have fellowship with saints, but He wants it to be with the glorious household of faith that He has designed that includes every saint the world over, throughout time and space. He wants us to go to a better place, but He wants that place to be far superior to what we know or can know. Indeed we serve a God of abundance.

The same is true of bearing fruit. We all have the responsibility to bear fruit. The beauty of this is found in Matthew 13:23.

“And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

If we but hear and understand the word, we WILL bear fruit. The only question is how much. Some will bear different amounts, But even this is blessed by the God of abundance. John states at 15:2:

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.”

If we work hard in applying the word of God to our lives and sow as we should, we WILL produce fruit; then He will prune us that we can go on to produce even more in the

Bearing Fruit

future!

Glory

Fruit-bearing glorifies God and us. That it glorifies God goes without saying. However, James says that if we humble ourselves, the Lord will exalt us. We will be glorified by working diligently for the Lord. What a blessing to be exalted by God for bearing fruit as we should! Let us not misunderstand, fruit-bearing is required. John says that the Lord WILL remove every branch that does not produce. Jesus taught the disciples this when He withered the fig tree for not producing. We MUST be fruit-producers.

Different Kinds of Fruit

The Bible tells us that there are different kinds of fruit. There is the fruit of benevolence. We see the good that can come from aiding our brethren by benevolent endeavors from such people as Tabitha (Dorcas). Tabitha was so good at producing fruit through benevolence that the widows she helped could not handle her being gone! Certainly we can see that she was a fruit-bearer. There is also fruit to be born from edification endeavors. The Hebrew writer said that we were to assemble in 10:25 for the purpose of building each other up. That endeavor should just increase day by day. When we look around and we see someone stronger as a result of effort another Christian has made toward that end, we can indeed see the fruit of edification.

However, as our study pertains, we are primarily concerned with the fruit produced from sowing the seed, that is, from evangelism. Fruit in this respect is the salvation of souls. Too many churches have come to the conclusion that the number on their board is what will be presented to the Lord. Unfortunately, much of the “growth” which these brethren point to is just from people “church hopping”. When we are talking about growth, we are discussing people who have been snatched from the clutches of Satan and brought into the kingdom of marvelous light.

Optimizing Evangelistic Fruit

There is no doubt that this is an extremely important endeavor. Reaching the lost is the primary mission of the Lord’s church, and it is also the most neglected. As we have stated, when we go to preach the gospel, we need to do so with a plan. There are things that we can do with a little forethought that will greatly increase our success in this area. Let’s consider some of those things now.

Bearing Fruit

Example

The sower needs to understand that they are always being watched. When we are at the supermarket, ball games, on the road or anywhere else, people are looking. Therefore, the way we conduct ourselves even in non-religious endeavors is important. Actually, one would be accurate in saying that especially in non-religious endeavors. When we think about it, while door knocking or the like, we will be on best behavior. However, the world is going to judge us by how we interact with others on a daily basis. Do we lose our temper in business situations or at ball games. Are we known to take advantage of others financially or not giving people the benefit of the doubt. Do people look at us and see someone who has no use for anyone who is not of the household of faith?

Peter told the wives of unbelieving husbands to be in subjection that they might be won over without a word. Indeed example is a powerful thing. When I engage in life from day to day, I need to do so with the understanding that people see me. Everything I do must be with the thought in the back of mind that people who I might try to teach the gospel to are watching. I could destroy a great opportunity by losing my cool or acting in an otherwise un-Christian manner. Paul wrote at Colossians 3:17:

“whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

If we are careful to do this in all respects, we will not destroy our influence. Once we have destroyed our influence in a place, it is a difficult thing to regain.

Ashamed?

Paul told the Romans that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God for salvation. Yet, many times people act as if they are ashamed of the word. What exactly is there to be ashamed of? The ability it has to save? The historical and scientific accuracy of it? The capacity it has to make people's lives unbelievably better?

When we sow the seed, we need to do it boldly. We have to stand straight and proud of the fact that we are sowing the only seed that is effective. The only thing that can help people in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. This will help us to boldly take advantage of every opportunity we are given. Do not shy away from teaching the gospel to whoever you encounter. Friend, Family or Foe. Everyone needs to hear the message of the gospel. It will not let you or them down. It does not change. It will be an anchor for them as it speaks of the hope that is an anchor for the soul.

Bearing Fruit

Technique

It is important to realize that in order to bear fruit we need to consider how we will go about it. It needs to be planned to the slightest detail. Here are some things to consider when we teach others.

1. It does not usually have to be done all at one sitting. This is the great benefit of our four lesson books. They are four one hour studies that help us to know when to shut up! Do not wear someone out that might would have listened otherwise.
2. When we go to people to set-up a study, set it up and leave. Many studies are lost when we stick around and talk them or us out of doing it.
3. Learn to present the gospel in a way that helps the person to see the importance of it to their lives. Paul did so in Acts 17 on Mars hill. We should do likewise.
4. Remove any hindrances. Bring an extra bible for them. Bring pre-filled lesson books for them in case they did not have the time to do it.
5. Keep them saying yes. So often the gospel is turned into a negative thing. Help them to see that it is positive and present it in a way from the word that makes it difficult for them to disagree.
6. Do not give them your contact information. They will have time to consider what they have done after you are gone. If they can contact you, they may cancel.
7. Be convinced of it yourself. It is next to impossible to teach something of which you are not convinced. That means you need to study and work on increasing your faith.
8. Never, ever, ever send them to their people. This is the fastest way to lose a study. We want to present the gospel as it is, not corrupted by the doctrine of a man.
9. Teach the gospel in a way that is fun. If we drone through the study like what we are teaching is not interesting, they will likely not see the value of it.

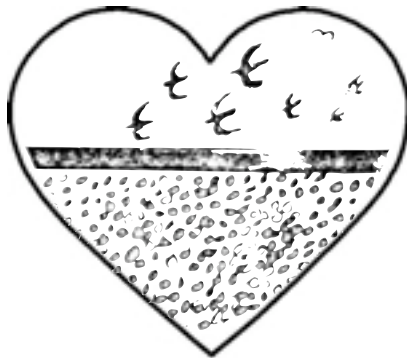
These are just a few ideas. Take some time to record some ideas that you think would be of benefit in setting up studies or teaching them. We will discuss them in class.

What is the Condition of Your Heart?

RESULTS:

- a. Uninterested ears.
- b. No penetration of soil.
- c. No means of protection.
- d. First interesting thing offered by Satan removes the good seed.
- e. No interest or effort is ever put forth by such.

WAYSIDE



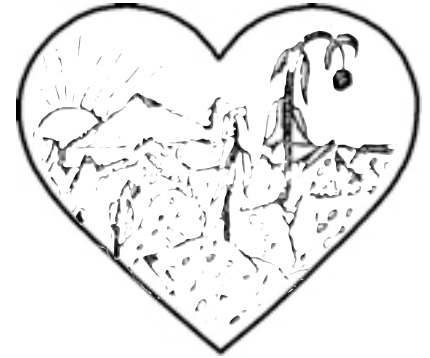
“HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.”

Matthew 13:4, 19

RESULTS:

- a. Seed falls into earth.
- b. Stones have not been removed.
- c. Eager and happy in receiving the seed.
- d. Not grounded below surface of feelings.
- e. Trouble comes.
- f. Falls away.

STONY



“HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.”

Matthew 13:5-6, 20

RESULTS:

- a. He receives seed in soil.
- b. Thorn seed in hiding.
- c. Crucifies not his care for the world and love for riches.
- d. These come forth and choke the word.
- e. UNFRUITFUL PLANT.

THORNY



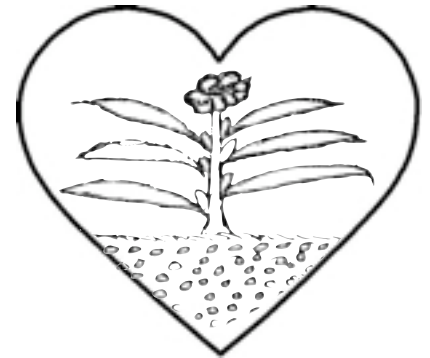
“HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.”

Matthew 13:7, 22

RESULTS:

- a. Receives in prepared soil.
- b. Understands.
- c. Bears Fruit.
- d. HARVEST UNLIMITED.

HONEST



“HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.”

Matthew 13:8, 23

Matthew 13:1-23

This book belongs to: