

The Sower and the Seed

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Introduction.

- A. Let me begin this morning by telling all of you just how proud I am of you. I am so pleased with the way our *Da Vinci Code* sermon Sunday went, and all of you are the reason it went so well. First, you really supported the sermon by coming out yourselves. Everybody who wasn't sick or out of town was here.
- B. Second, you really supported the sermon by inviting your friends to hear it. We had a number of visitors last Sunday morning, and they came because you invited them. For those of you who had friends here, great job! For those of you who invited people who didn't come—and I know there were a lot of you—great job for you guys too. Just keep talking to people, and sooner or later, somebody will listen. For those of you who didn't invite anybody. . . well. . . make an effort to do better next time.
- C. There *is* going to be a next time, you know. It's so critical for this church to reach out to the community, and a great way to do that is just inviting our friends to hear sermons that are geared toward them too. Regularly, we're going to be doing just the same thing we did with *The Da Vinci Code*: every month or so, we're going to have sermons we can invite people to. I don't have all the sermon topics yet, so if you have anything you think your friends would be interested in, let me know and I'll preach on it.
- D. When that time comes, when I start talking about it before every sermon and when we start giving you cards to hand out, let's all commit to doing an even better job than we did this time. Let's all commit to inviting even more people. This isn't just something for grownups, either. I think we have a phenomenal group of kids; don't we, folks? Here's what I want to see: The next time we do this, I want to see ALL of you bringing friends to the special sermon with you. In fact, who knows—the next sermon may well be directed especially toward young people. Let's all do what we can to support these special sermons.
- E. There's something else I'd like to bring up now, too. Over on the wall by the door is a box marked "Questions," and I haven't said anything about that box since I've been here, and nobody's put anything in that box. It's time for that to change. There's some blank paper in the box now, and if you've got a question, I want you to write it down and put it in. Then, here's what we're going to do: I don't want to preach sermons on those questions. After all, if I'm doing all the talking, you don't get the chance to say whether I've answered your questions or not. Instead, once we get enough questions, we're going to have a Sunday night Bible study. I'll print all the questions up on a worksheet, hand the sheet out, and then, the next Sunday night, we'll go through together and see what answers the Bible gives us.
- F. I have to say that I'm really excited about the way things are going now. I'm so blessed to be working with such a great congregation, and I believe that together, we can grow both numerically and spiritually. However, we can't be discouraged when things don't work the way we want. For us to do the Lord's work in this area requires faith and patience. This is one of Jesus' points in His teaching in Matthew 13:1-9. Let's consider it now, to see what we can learn from the story of the sower and the seed.

I. By the Wayside.

- A. The first kind of ground that Jesus describes is the wayside, basically, a place where the soil has been packed down by many feet and there is no cover. In such an environment, seeds cannot even begin to grow, and they just lie there until something happens to them. In the parable, birds come and eat them.
- B. Of course, this parable has a metaphorical meaning. First, we need to understand what the seed is. Jesus never explicitly defines the seed in Matthew 13, but 1 Peter 1:22-23 does. The seed is the word of God, by which we are begotten as Christians. This seed falls upon us whenever we hear the gospel.
- C. In this case, Jesus tells us in Matthew 13:19 that the real-life analog of the seed sown by the road is those who hear the gospel, but have the seed snatched out of their hearts by Satan. Here's the point:
 1. First, what made it possible for the seed to be snatched up in the first place was the hardness of the ground. This tells us that there are going to be some people whose hearts will refuse the gospel. Just like dirt gets packed down when we walk on it, so too some people just have hard hearts.
 2. Second, this hardness of heart means that the devil has an easy time snatching away the seed of the word by using any number of helpers. These include the false teachers who persuade others to exchange the truth for a lie, family members who threaten to disown the would-be Christian, atheists who claim that only the ignorant believe in God, and so on. Once the seed is snatched away, it never bears fruit. People in this category never become Christians.

II. On Stony Places.

- A. The Lord also describes seed that falls on stony places. This kind of seed sprouts up, but the soil is so poor that it never takes root. When the sun rises, it scorches and kills the plant.
- B. Jesus explains this portion of the parable in Matthew 23:20-21. He informs us that this portion of the parable describes people who hear the word, receive it with joy, but encounter affliction and fall away as a result. Once again, there are some things we need to learn from this:
 1. First, this soil is made up of those who have become Christians. The seed has begun to sprout in their lives, which means that they have obeyed the gospel. These are folks in church buildings.
 2. Second, this passage tells us that every new Christian is going to encounter trial. Did you catch that? In the parable, the sun isn't a force whose effect is limited to one kind of soil. When the sun rises, it rises over everything, and in just the same way, problems are going to arise in the life of every Christian. The question is, what are we going to do about it? Just like the sun, these problems are a two-edged sword. The sun can either kill plants or cause them to flourish, and affliction either kills Christians or causes them to flourish. Any problem we face is a chance to become closer to God.
 3. The quality of the Christian's heart is what will determine his fate. Many hearts withstand the test, but some do not. This soil is the kind of Christian who experiences some tragedy in his life, like a family member dying, and blames it on God. It's also the kind of Christian whose new life conflicts with his former life, who misses the way things used to be, and who goes back to it. It is the Christian whose life shows all the signs of Christianity but isn't truly rooted in Christ.

III. Among the Thorns.

- A. The third event Jesus describes is when seed falls among the thorns. This seed also springs up, but the thorns choke the young plants out and prevent them from becoming fruitful.
- B. Jesus gives His explanation for this event in Matthew 13:22. This soil is those who hear the word, receive it, but allow the things of this world, like worry and the deceitfulness of wealth, to choke it out. As a result, people like this never bear fruit for Jesus. Here's what we need to draw out of this:
 1. As before, the thorny soil is not those who never become Christians. These are people who have obeyed the gospel. Nor are these even people who fall away. The seed in the case of the thorny ground is still alive. These are people who are still Christians. They go through their entire lives sitting in a pew somewhere, to all appearances faithful to the Lord.
 2. The problem is, though, that other things are growing in their hearts besides the word. They are distracted by worry about things of this life, they are fascinated by making money, and so, even though they go to church, they never get around to doing useful things for God's kingdom. That's what makes this portion of the parable so challenging to us. These people who are still hanging on as nominally faithful Christians are not pleasing to God. God demands from all of us that we be more than churchgoers. It's not enough for us to warm a pew. He requires that we all bear fruit.

IV. On the Good Ground.

- A. So far, none of the seed has done well, but the parable ends on an upbeat note. Jesus concludes by describing seed that falls on good ground. This seed yields the crop that the sower wants.
- B. As Jesus explains in Matthew 13:23, the soil in this case is the good and honest heart. This kind of heart receives the word, just like two of the other three soils described, but unlike them, it has the strength to resist temptation and the purity of mind to ignore distraction. Because the possessor of this heart is strong and committed to the kingdom, he brings forth fruit. He does the things that God wants.
- C. This is the kind of soil that we want to see, both in our lives and in the lives of others. Here's what we need to do to make sure that we see it:
 1. First, we have to **KEEP GOING**. None of us are exempt from the hardships of being a Christian. There are going to be times when Satan tempts all of us to quit. When that happens, we have to learn from the experience. We have to fight toward God, rather than wander away from Him.
 2. Second, we have to **KEEP GROWING**. God will not accept us just because we're baptized if we sit around the church building for the next fifty years and don't do anything for Him. Instead, we must constantly be looking for ways to bring forth fruit for Jesus. We can't ever be content with how useful we are; instead, we must have a heart that wants to be more useful still.
 3. One way we can do this is through our last point: **KEEP SOWING**. Sometimes, it looks like we've got nothing but roadside hearts around us, but there is good soil out there too. We need to be consistent in sowing the seed of the gospel, so that it can bear fruit in those hearts too.

Conclusion. If you would like to become useful to the Lord, you can start today.