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Bridgeway Church
Kept for Jesus Christ #2

Sermon Summary #2

So Close, Yet So Very Far Away Matthew 7:15-23; 12:22-32; 13:1-9, 18-23

Last week I introduced our new sermon series by giving you the illustration of a young man named Charley who professed faith in Christ at the age of 12, appeared to live a Christian life for quite a few years, only to walk away from Christianity while in college and end up in angry atheism and bitterness toward both the faith in which he had been raised and the Christian church. I asked how we might explain Charley's experience.

Was he truly born again at the age of 12 and later apostatized from the faith, thereby losing or forfeiting his salvation? That's the answer of *Arminian* theology and those in the Nazarene, Methodist, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, and Free-Will Baptist traditions.

Others argue that Charley was truly saved at 12 and still is now at the age of 30, even though he lives in open, defiant, unrepentant sin and unbelief, and even though he may continue to live this way until his death. He didn't lose his salvation, but will likely suffer the loss of rewards in the coming kingdom. Although advocates of this view object to the label, I'll call these people *Antinomians* because of their insistence that whereas Charley ought to obey the principles and precepts of Scripture, if he doesn't he's still saved.

The view that I believe is most consistent with Scripture is that if Charley was genuinely born again at age 12, he still is, and God will bring discipline to his life and eventually restore to him the joy of his salvation. In some cases, as was true with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts and some of the Christians in Corinth in the first century, this discipline of the Lord leads to premature physical death. But the child of God remains a child of God.

A more likely scenario is that notwithstanding his profession of faith at 12, Charley never genuinely repented and trusted Christ. His religious or spiritual experience may have had a temporary impact on his life, sufficient to deceive not only himself but others into thinking he was truly saved. But had he truly been born again he would have persevered in faith and obedience. Whatever rebellion or backsliding he may have experienced, God would eventually have brought conviction of sin to his heart, repentance to his life, and a restoration of his relationship with Christ.

Today we are going to examine at least two and, if time allows, perhaps three well-known passages in Matthew's gospel, each of which will help us in its own way come to a deeper understanding of the nature of true, saving faith, and its counterfeit.

Matthew 7:15-23

What do you do when a person claims to be a Christian, attends church on a regular basis, knows the definitions of all those big theological words, and is even dedicated to ministry and appears to be successful not simply in the little things but especially in the supernatural dimension? Jesus warns us not to be gullible or to believe everything they say or that we see. This is clearly his point in our first passage today, Matthew 7:15-23.

False prophets are nothing new. God warned the people through Jeremiah in the 6th century b.c. "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land," declared the Lord; "the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; [and] my people love to have it so" (5:30-31a). Again, in 14:14, we read: "And the Lord said to me: 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.'"

The NT describes on several occasions the threat posed by false prophets in the church (see Acts 20:29-31; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 4).

Look at how Jesus describes them.

He speaks first of their *deception*. They “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (7:15). I’m not worried about the bald-faced, openly heretical lie or the false teacher who makes no bones about the fact that he is teaching heresy. Jesus here has in mind those who sneak in secretly, bearing all the regalia of religiosity: robes, and academic degrees, and theological vocabulary, and persuasive speech, and a charismatic personality. They sound orthodox. They appear to say and do all the right things, so far as we can see. But inwardly they are “ravenous wolves” who desire to consume you personally, financially, and spiritually.

Eventually, though, *their fruit will betray them*. The imagery Jesus uses in vv. 16-19 would mean more to his original audience than to us. In Palestine there was a certain thorn bush called the buckthorn which had small black berries that from a distance closely resembled grapes. And there was a certain thistle which had a flower that from a distance could be mistaken for a fig. The point is there may be a superficial resemblance between the true and the false, but on closer inspection you see that a buckthorn cannot yield grapes nor can a thistle produce figs. Given enough time, people will always be true to their inner nature. The rotten tree will eventually produce rotten fruit.

The “fruit” Jesus has in mind is both their doctrine and their deeds, both what they teach and how they live. Sometimes it’s more what they don’t say than what they do. They scrupulously avoid difficult and demanding biblical truths like God’s holiness and human sinfulness and judgment and repentance and eternal punishment. Their preaching is intentionally vague and psychologically soothing.

“You will recognize them by their fruits” (v. 20). Jesus’ point here is crucial: Eventually, given enough time, those who truly know God will display the fruit of the Spirit, whereas those who do not will produce rotten apples and worm-eaten oranges and toxic tomatoes. *The conduct of one’s life will invariably, over time, reveal the character of one’s heart.*

This is why Jesus warns us of this ominous and unsettling truth: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven”** (v. 21). Several things here deserve our close attention.

First, Jesus does not mean by this that we can dispense with professions of faith, as if what we say or declare is useless. Cf. Romans 9:9-10! Nor are we being told that addressing Jesus as “Lord” is wrong. Neither is Jesus saying that good works justify us in God’s sight or earn entrance into the kingdom. As we’ll see later on, we are *not* saved *by* good works but we *are* saved *for* them.

Second, these whom Jesus has in mind are fervent and zealous: “Lord! Lord!” They are not ashamed of the name of Christ. They appeal to the fact that all their “works” were done in his name.

Third, they are probably convinced they are really saved. They will be astonished at the judgment seat on the final day. Their “assurance” of salvation is grounded solely in their profession, not their practice. Yes, they have “works” to which they may point, but not the kind or quality which qualify as “the Father’s will.” What is the “will” of the Father? Later in John’s gospel Jesus says, “This is the will of my Father, that you believe in me whom he has sent.” And what are the “works” that bear witness to the reality of this faith? Just think back to the Beatitudes, earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. Poverty of spirit. Humility. Mourning for sin. Purity of heart. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Mercy. Self-sacrifice. Love.

Fourth, how did these people come to be so deceived? They get swept up in the euphoria of supernatural displays of power and mysterious religious experiences, and think that such are the same as true spirituality and genuine love for God. So long as they can produce spectacular results and keep people in awe of their authority and spiritual prowess, less sensational things like humility and love and prayer and repentance are ignored.

But if these are unbelievers, how can they perform miracles? (1) Perhaps they do so with God’s permission, as was the case with Balaam in the OT or Judas Iscariot in the NT. They were both unbelievers but prophesied and healed the sick and cast out demons. Theologians refer to this as “common grace.” It is the grace and enabling power of the Holy Spirit at work in unbelievers, empowering them to do countless things that are beneficial and good and helpful, even though they remain unregenerate and lost in sin. People often lose sight of how much the Holy Spirit

accomplishes for and through non-Christians, short of salvation itself. (2) Then, of course, their claims may be spurious. The miracles they *claim* to have performed may be false, faked, and contrived.

The declaration in v. 23 is startling. Jesus says, in effect, “I don’t care about your miracles if you have no mercy. I don’t care about your works of power if there is no purity. I don’t care about your exorcisms if there is no encouragement. I have never known you in a saving way. *You are strangers to me.* All your activity, all your religious deeds that you thought were righteous and would earn your acceptance with my Father, are in fact lawless and loathsome. Depart from me!”

It would be possible to extend our Lord’s comments to something like this: “*Lord, Lord, were we not members of a church? Did we not support it with our finances? Did we not serve in children’s ministry once a month, perhaps even twice a month? Lord, were we not good American citizens who paid our taxes?*”

The primary point for us as we consider this text is that merely professing to know Jesus, claiming to know Jesus, doing good and even supernatural deeds in the name of Jesus, does not of itself mean that Jesus knows you. And thus when such people are exposed or walk away of their own accord, we must not conclude that they were once truly saved but have apostatized and lost their salvation.

Matthew 12:22-32

It’s not uncommon for people to say that someone they know who was truly born again and trusted Christ for the forgiveness of their sins has committed the “unpardonable sin” or has committed “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” and is now lost and destined for eternal death. I’ve encountered numerous Christians who were convinced that they themselves had committed this sin. They typically point to Matthew 12 to prove their position.

Make no mistake: knowing and resting in the truth that one’s sins are forgiven is an incomparable blessing and delight. This is why the words of Jesus here in Matthew 12 are so unsettling. Look with me at vv. 31-32 -

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

Are you confused by this? On the one hand, as we saw last week, Jesus says in John 6 that whoever comes to him he will by no means ever cast out. Yet, on the other hand, here in Matthew 12 he says that whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will *never* be forgiven, neither now nor in the age to come. Both statements must be true. What, then, do they mean?

This ominous declaration by Jesus *doesn’t occur in a vacuum*. Something happened to provoke it. So let’s look at the context.

The religious leaders had just witnessed Jesus cast out a demon from someone and they concluded from it that Jesus was himself possessed by Beelzebul or Satan and that it was in fact Satan himself who enabled Jesus to do this.

We are told that a man who was both blind and mute, he couldn’t see or speak, was brought to Jesus. Jesus proceeded to cast out the demon and heal the man. Instantly he could see and speak. The miracle was *incontestable and beyond dispute*. No one doubted that he was truly blind and mute. And the scribes didn’t doubt that he was also demonized.

Matthew says that “all the people were amazed” (12:23): they were astounded, knocked back on their heels; they were left breathless. This was an unusually overwhelming miracle. It was so undeniably supernatural that the people begin to wonder whether or not Jesus might in fact be the Son of David, the Messiah.

Their options are limited. There are **only two possible explanations** for what happened. This was no magical sleight of hand. This wasn’t a case of some slick magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat or doing amazing things with a deck of cards. *This man was blind and mute and everyone knew it.* We’ve all heard stories of a perfectly healthy woman

being put in a wheel chair as if she were paralyzed, only to be “miraculously healed” by some unscrupulous charlatan who then quickly makes an appeal for money. But in the case of this young man, either his healing was the work of God or of the Devil. Since they refused to acknowledge that it was God, they had no other options than to conclude Jesus did it by the power of Satan himself.

Our Lord’s response is profound. In essence he says, “Satan may be evil, but he’s not stupid!” That is to say, any kingdom or house or city that develops internal strife will ultimately self-destruct. Satan’s domain is no different. Aside from God himself, Satan is probably the most intelligent being in the universe. He is not so insane as to permit internal division or civil war among his demons. Satan is committed to self-preservation. He will do nothing that might threaten or reduce his power. In other words, Satan would never be guilty of spiritual suicide. Jesus isn’t saying that there is harmony or trust or loyalty in Satan’s kingdom. Undoubtedly every demon in existence is selfish and perverted. But Satan would never allow any demon to undermine his efforts. Quite simply, Satan does not cast out Satan.

This leads Jesus to declare that whereas all sins can be forgiven, even blasphemy against himself (vv. 21-32a), “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (v. 32).

I’ll return to this in just a moment, but before I try to explain what the unforgivable or unpardonable sin is, I need to explain **what it is not**, because I assure you there are people here today who are convinced they’ve committed it!

People have often said that the unforgivable sin is **murder**. If you kill an innocent human being, God will never forgive you. But consider Moses, David, and Paul!

Others have argued that **adultery** is the unforgivable sin. But again, David committed adultery and yet it was he who wrote the majority of the Psalms we sing and celebrate! And what about the woman taken in adultery in John 8 whom Jesus forgave and told her to go and sin no more? And what about the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4?

Maybe the unpardonable sin is **denying Jesus under pressure or threat of persecution**. But consider Peter, who denied Jesus three times!

Some have argued that **suicide** is the unforgivable sin. But no text in either the Old or New Testaments ever says any such thing.

There are probably quite a few of you who have lived in fear that you committed the unforgivable sin when you **took the Lord’s name in vain**. Perhaps in a moment of rage or bitterness or disappointment you **cursed the Lord** or strung together a bunch of **expletives** or used the **‘f’ word** repeatedly or some such thing. Or perhaps in your frustration and confusion you **angrily declared that God doesn’t exist or that he has miserably failed you**. As serious as these sins are, they are not beyond forgiveness!

What is the Unforgivable/Unpardonable Sin?

Jesus is very specific in identifying the nature of this sin: it is **blasphemy against the Holy Spirit!** The religious leaders were not being accused of blaspheming against Jesus himself, a sin for which there is forgiveness (12:32).

Why was their sin against the Holy Spirit and not against Jesus? Their sin was against the Holy Spirit because it was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus performed his healings and miracles. Jesus himself said in v. 28 that it was “by the Spirit of God” that he “cast out demons.” Once again we see that the life Jesus lived, he lived in the power of the Spirit. The miracles he performed, he performed in the power of the Spirit.

What the religious leaders were saying is: **“Jesus, we don’t deny that a great healing miracle has occurred. We don’t deny that you cast out a demon from that man. But the power by which you did it was the power of Satan.”**

Thus their sin was **attributing to the Devil what the Spirit did**. They didn’t deny the existence of the supernatural. They didn’t deny the reality of the miracle. They simply said, in a remarkable display of hardness of heart and spiritual blindness: the Devil enabled and empowered you to do it.

But we still don't know *why* this was regarded by Jesus as so heinous of a sin that it was beyond forgiveness. Why was this blasphemy of the Spirit and his work so horrible, so reprehensible, so utterly outrageous that forgiveness becomes impossible?

The answer is found in the relationship between Jesus and the religious leaders and how they responded to him. Their repudiation of Jesus was **not** the result of ignorance or lack of evidence or because they believed the negative report of someone else who didn't like Jesus.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is willful, wide-eyed, persistent, unrepentant slandering of the work of the Spirit, attributing to the devil what was undeniably divine. These people had seen as clearly as anyone could see and understood as lucidly as anyone could understand that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of the Spirit. Yet they defiantly insisted, contrary to what they knew to be true, that it was Satan who empowered him.

The miracles Jesus performed were credentials of heaven. The religious leaders declared them to be the credentials of hell. They didn't merely deny Jesus' deity. They, in effect, declared him to be a demon! His family may have thought he was mentally deranged, but the Pharisees declared him to be morally demonic.

This was not a one-time, momentary slip or inadvertent mistake in judgment. This was a persistent, life-long rebellion in the face of inescapable and undeniable truth.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is *not a careless act* committed only once in a moment of rage or rebellion, but a *calloused attitude* over time; a persistent defiance that hardens and calcifies the heart.

The **Pharisees** had been present when Jesus healed the sick. They saw him perform miracles up close and personal. They witnessed him raise the dead. They watched with their very eyes as skin infected with leprosy suddenly and decisively became clean and smooth and whole. They heard him teach with power and authority. They watched as demons fled his presence as he set free those in bondage. They watched with their own eyes as he gave sight to the blind. ***Notwithstanding all this, they openly and persistently and angrily and arrogantly declared that he did it all by the power of the Devil!***

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is **not just unbelief**; the sort of unbelief or rejection or doubt that is so typical in our world. ***This is defiance of what one knows beyond any shadow of doubt to be true. It is not mere denial, but determined denial; not mere rejection but wanton, willful, wicked, wide-eyed rejection.***

This sin, therefore, isn't unforgivable because there is a defect in the atoning death of Jesus. It isn't unforgivable because there is a limit to God's grace and mercy or because of some other shortcoming in the character of God.

The NT makes it plain that *sins are forgiven only if a person repents* (cf. Mark 1:4, 14, 15; 4:12; 6:12; Acts 2:38; 5:31). *In order for anyone to receive forgiveness of sins, they have to repent*, that is, to turn from sin to God and trust his grace and follow him. So when Jesus says that "every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people" (Mt. 12:31), he means, every sin and blasphemy *from which you genuinely repent*.

Why, then, does Jesus seem to exclude one sin and one blasphemy from this promise: the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? I think the reason is ***that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit puts you beyond repentance, and therefore beyond forgiveness.***

John Piper has wisely pointed out that verse 32 is *not* an exception to verse 31. Jesus is *not* saying, "All *blasphemies that you repent of* will be forgiven except blasphemy against the Spirit." No. He is saying, "All *blasphemies that you repent of* will be forgiven; but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven because it puts you beyond repentance. It is a sin that by its very definition and nature makes it impossible for you any longer to repent." If a sin makes it impossible for you to repent, then that is an unforgivable sin, because forgiveness is promised only to those sins from which we genuinely repent.

This sin precludes pardon because by its very nature it precludes repentance. A sin of which one may repent is not the unpardonable sin. Therefore, those who are most worried that they may have committed

the unpardonable sin have not. This is a sin for which there is no concern, no conviction, no anxiety, and thus no repentance. It is a sin that is so hard-hearted and willful and persistent and defiant that the one committing it couldn't care less that he or she is committing it.

Remember: **Jesus is addressing unbelievers.** He is addressing and thus describing first-century religious leaders whose hard-hearted hatred of him is so deep that they attribute the Spirit's work through him to the Satan. So, yes, *it is possible for a person to put himself or herself beyond the possibility of forgiveness.* But that is not God's fault. It is not for lack of mercy in him. It is not because he is limited in compassion or power or grace. It **is** because a man or woman who has seen the truth and heard the truth and even tasted the truth has chosen to harden their heart to the point that they have rendered themselves impervious to repentance and conviction.

Let me speak to ***those of you who are convinced you have committed the unforgiveable sin***, or at least are fearful that you may have. A particular sin in your life has caused you massive internal anguish . . . indescribable emotional pain . . . piercing guilt . . . a shame so heavy and paralyzing that you feel as if every breath of spiritual life is being squeezed out of you.

Trust me, I know about this because dozens and dozens of you have come to talk to me over the years. I can't begin to count the number of people who are broken and shaking and weep endlessly and lose sleep and when they do sleep experience horrid nightmares because they are convinced they have committed a sin that God cannot or will not forgive.

Trust me: if I've just described you, I tell you on the authority of the Word of God, I tell you with absolute confidence and joy, you have ***not*** committed the unforgiveable sin!

- People who are ashamed of their sin have not committed the unforgiveable sin. The unforgiveable sin is committed shamelessly over time.
- People who feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who sense the piercing presence of guilt for having violated God's Word, have not committed the unforgiveable sin. People who commit this sin feel no guilt. If anything, they are proud of what they've done.
- People who are in fear they have committed the unforgiveable sin, have not. The heart given to this depth of depravity has no fear of God or fear of judgment.
- People who are broken by their sin, who are grieved by their sin, have not committed the unforgiveable sin.

The bottom line is that I know with complete confidence when you have ***not*** committed the unforgiveable sin. But *I don't know when, if at all, a person has committed* a sin in such a way that they have put themselves beyond the forgiveness of God.

The unpardonable sin, therefore, or blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, is not a single sin committed by a Christian that results in the loss of salvation. It is a deep-seated, entrenched, life-long disdain for Jesus that *unbelievers*, like the Pharisees of the first century, commit. People guilty of this sin remain unrepentant and defiant. Because this hard-hearted repudiation of Jesus is life-long and puts one beyond the power of repentance, it is beyond the possibility of forgiveness.

[Allow me for a moment to speak to the two sorts of people who most need to hear these two texts. Some of you have ***a conscience like concrete***. You aren't in the least bothered by your sin. You aren't in the least broken by your arrogance and presumption. You are spiritually hard-hearted and proud. You think you're saved. You point to your religious life, your church attendance, your faithfulness in tithing, your voting record, and the fact that you openly declare your allegiance to Jesus. To you, Jesus says: ***"I don't know you. I never have."*** It's not that Jesus will confess his ignorance of your existence. He simply means, "You have no relationship with me. You never repented of your religion and cried out to me for forgiveness and devoted yourself by the grace of the Spirit to live in a way that pleases my Father. Depart from me."

Is it possible for such unregenerate people, unsaved people to put themselves beyond the possibility of repentance and thus beyond the hope of forgiveness? Yes. So I appeal to you: Repent, and believe the gospel, and embrace Jesus alone as Lord.

There is another sort of conscience, far removed from the first, at the other end of the spiritual spectrum, so to speak. I'm talking about *the overly sensitive, hyper-active, excessively tender conscience*. This is the person who is suffocating in shame and burdened by guilt and wallowing in self-contempt. This is the man or woman who lives in constant, daily, hourly fear that they've committed the unforgiveable sin, perhaps multiple times. Far from walking in confidence and the assurance of salvation, they live in dread anxiety and hopelessness and the paralyzing fear that God has forever forsaken them. I assure you, he has not.

Jesus speaks to both kinds of conscience today. Hear him.]

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

What we've seen so far is that it is possible for a person to hear God's Word, profess faith in Jesus, perform supernatural deeds in ministry, and yet be eternally lost. It isn't because they are saved and later apostatize. It is because their so-called "faith" is shallow and spurious. Nowhere is this possibility more vividly seen than in the famous parable of the sower or parable of the seeds.

The point of this parable is that the kingdom of God is coming into the world just like seed sown by a farmer. In spite of Satan's opposition and the hardness of human hearts, the kingdom is gradually bearing fruit among God's chosen. The kingdom is here now, yielding fruit, but the final harvest is yet to come. Contrary to the expectations of the Jews, *the kingdom displays only moderate success*, much as the farmer's seed only partially takes root and yields a crop. The kingdom does not force itself upon people; it must be willingly received.

Thus the kingdom is both present and future. It is present, bearing its fruit, even as the seed sown by the farmer yields its fruit. It is also future, to be revealed and consummated in glory, even as the full harvest of the farmer's crop is yet to come.

But is there any other significance in the details of the parable? Yes, but only because Jesus himself interprets them for us.

The sower = Christ (or anyone who proclaims the word of the gospel)

The seed = the word of the kingdom / the gospel

The soils = the hearts of men and women

The birds = Satanic/demonic opposition

Thorns = worry and deceit of world and wealth.

Those who've studied this parable closely point out that it isn't important that there were 4 soils; there could as easily have been 3 or 7. We can't conclude from the fact that only 1 of 4 produced fruit that Christians will always be a minority in the world. The meaning wouldn't change if the **reason** for the failure of the seed was different: rodents could have eaten the seed instead of birds; an unseasonable cloudburst could have washed it away instead of it being scorched by the sun; tender shoots of grain could have been crushed under foot instead of being choked by thorns.

Clearly, though, **Jesus wants us to consider what kind of soil our hearts prove to be**. He is issuing to us a challenge concerning how we hear the word of the Gospel and how we respond to it. There are here four kinds of people, *four kinds of response* to the gospel of the kingdom.

First, there is the indifferent person (v. 19) – They may hear, listen, yet understand nothing. The human heart can be so pounded and beaten down by the traffic of sin that it is like spiritual concrete, impervious and insensitive to the gospel. Before they know it, Satan has come and taken the seed away. No matter how well or effectively or long or short or powerfully I may preach, this person is unaffected.

Second, there is the impulsive person (vv. 20-21) – These are the sort who “convert” at a revival meeting, a retreat, or a youth camp. Wherever emotions are high and the gospel is portrayed as promising health, wealth, ease, and popularity, people will “believe”. This is epidemic today. This response is enthusiastic but shallow; there is no deep consideration of the gospel and its implications; there is no counting of the cost. This response is quick, euphoric, but false; it soon fades. Beware of so-called “conversions” that are all smiles and no repentance, no brokenness over sin, no humility.

There is no root in this kind of “belief”. External pressures, trials, troubles, persecution, expectations that aren’t fulfilled, soon bring this person back to reality. Like the sun beating down on a rootless plant, the shallowness of the soil is manifest. Notice that they “immediately” receive it with joy (v. 20) they endure “for a while,” and then “immediately” fall away. The time between these two may be years. Many spend years in church until something doesn’t go their way or life turns sour. They expect God to deliver them from every trial and when he doesn’t they abandon their profession of faith. The gospel that he thought was the key to prosperity and popularity has now brought hardship, trial, and persecution.

Third, there is the inconvenient person (v. 22) – These are the people who profess faith in Jesus so long as it is convenient and comfortable and fulfilling. They experience a momentary fervor that is soon replaced by thirst for more money, concern for reputation, etc. Fashion, career, prestige, etc. are like weeds that will ultimately choke off any hope of spiritual life. Being a follower of Jesus is ok so long as there’s enough time for it. But if it should get in the way of extra time at the lake or a couple more rounds of golf or illicit sex or whatever else it is that you consider so indispensable in your life, well, so much the worse for following Jesus.

Fourth, there is the invested person (v. 23) – I say “invested” because when they hear and receive the word they invest their lives in it; they not only embrace it as intellectually credible but also as spiritually satisfying. They are invested in the truth of Christianity such that they sacrifice everything to build upon it and entrust their lives to it, both now and for eternity. *The proof of their conversion is their perseverance in bearing fruit.*

Like the soils before them, they experience tribulation and persecution. They have “cares” and concerns in this world. They face the daily deceitfulness of riches and wealth. They are tempted to abandon the faith to gain more stuff and to advance in their careers. They know what it’s like to suffer loss for the sake of their relationship to Jesus. They struggle with a desire for other things. They don’t always resist temptation successfully. Their faith falters on occasion. They have their doubts.

But at no time do they abandon their confidence in Christ. At no time do they walk away from the hope of the gospel for the sake of money or fame or safety.

Conclusion . . .