

Your Heart and God's Word, Part 2

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We are going to get into a great text this morning as we return to Luke 8 and the parable of the soils, or the parable of the sower, or the parable of the heart—however you want to look at it.

Have you ever wondered why some people can't seem to understand Christianity? Why when some people hear the gospel—they've had the gospel explained to them many times, but the whole idea that God became a man, lived a perfect life, did miracles, died on the cross, and rose again the third day—they just look at you [and say], "I can't believe you are so naive as to believe such a fairy tale"?

Have you ever wondered how there can be unbelieving Bible scholars? Now, is that ever an oxymoron, or what? An unbelieving Bible scholar: "Well, I don't go to church. I study the Bible for a living—that is my profession. But I don't believe in God." That is so strange! What about the people who hear the gospel, but reject it time and time again? Or the people who grew up in a Christian family and seem to be doing great and as soon as they get a chance to leave home they just leave the Lord as they leave home? What is that? What is happening there?

What about the person who seems to come to salvation? He gets involved in church and seems excited for a while, really excited. Everything is so new; everything is so wonderful. All of a sudden some girl comes along, or some guy comes along, or some high-paying job comes along and he just says,

“Oh, it was fun trying out Jesus,” and he walks away. And that’s it. People like this are like the cars on the freeway in number. They are everywhere. All of us know, or have known, people like this. They’re everywhere. Every believer asks the question, “Why? Why does this happen?” The parable of the sower answers that question. That is its primary purpose.

[Prior to giving this parable,] Jesus has been traveling around the country with a group of followers: some men, some women, and the Twelve. These people all believe in Him. They’re kind of an entourage. They are traveling around and Jesus is preaching the gospel, and preaching the gospel, and preaching the gospel and what’s happening is, those who believe are watching multitudes reject Him.

Jesus knows what’s going on in their hearts. [They’re asking,] “Why? Why?” To them it seems so clear, so plain, so obvious: Jesus is the Messiah. He’s doing miracles! He’s raising people from the dead! He’s healing all manner of disease and sickness and casting out demons and “Hello! He’s the Messiah!” Yet these [other] people [who are coming to hear him preach] are unmoved. They come, they watch the miracles, they are very fascinated—maybe they eat some miraculous fish or loaves of bread—and then they go home. Jesus knows that there is a frustration in the heart of every believer that asks, “Why? Why does this happen?” So that is why He gives the parable of the soils.

We come to Luke 8:4, where we have the situation that leads to Jesus’ giving the parable. Then in verses 5 through 8, Jesus gives the parable itself. In verses 9 and 10, Jesus explains why He teaches in parables. Finally, in verses 11 through 15, He interprets and explains the parable’s spiritual meaning.

From this parable you should learn three reasons why some people permanently receive the gospel and then persevere to maintain fruit and others don’t. That’s the whole point of this parable. We’re going to learn some other good things along the way, but that is the big bite, the big idea.

First, let’s talk about the situation that led to Jesus’ giving the parable. Look at verse 4: “When a large crowd was coming together, and those from

the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable.” What you need to remember is that, up to this point, Jesus hasn’t really taught a lot in parables. There have been a couple of little ones, but He hasn’t been teaching [using parables]. As people are rejecting Him more and more, as the gospel is being rejected—His message, His teaching, and His miracles are being rejected more and more by the multitudes—He then begins to teach more and more in parables. As a matter of fact, Mark really emphasizes this and says things like, “And He never talked to them at all except by parables after a certain point” [see Mark 4:34]. It just was over.

If you are a hard-hearted unbeliever, you *only* get parables. He began to change and switch His teaching from very straightforward, clear teaching to parables. In Luke 8:4 it says, “When a large crowd was coming together”—they were gathering because they had heard about His miracles and His teaching and all of it. They were a bunch of fascinated people coming to Him—and His little entourage of believers that was with Him—they all came and that was the situation that led to Jesus giving the parable. This is what you need to keep in mind.

He is preaching the gospel and some people are accepting Him, but most are rejecting Him. Jesus, knowing that He is going to send His disciples out and knowing how exasperating it is when people reject the message, wants to equip them. He wants to equip them so they know how to respond, and how to reason through, and how to answer the question of: “Why do some people respond to God’s word and other people do not?”

Before we look at the parable itself, we need to talk a little about agriculture in those days, and then it will make the parable much easier to understand. In those days, a farmer would have a field and he would plow the field at the right time of year. He would get an ox or two and pull a plow that was a big pointy thing that just stuck in the ground. It wasn’t that complex—it had wide handles and you could just turn over the soil [with it]. [The farmer] would go over the field probably a couple of times just to break up the soil into chunks and maybe drag it with another skid in order to break up those big chunks. So the soil would become friable—loose with

clods and cracks. If [the farmer] encountered a rock, he would take the rock and throw it either on the outside of the field along the perimeter or in piles. (If you go to places where they have rocks and soil and farming, you will still see this today. You will see a field, and in the field they have these piles where they throw the rocks that seem to perpetually rise up to the surface.)

Then the farmer would wait because at that time, in that culture and place—that geographic location—the rains would come in very regular cycles. There would be the former and latter-day rains and they knew almost within weeks when [the rains] would come and [the farmers] would get out there and they would sow the seed. The seed would be put in a sack and [the farmers] would walk around and throw it around. It wasn't really scientific. You would just cast it around the field. There weren't nice, neat rows like we have in fields today.

In the process of throwing the [seed on the] field, some [seed] would fall on the pathway or the road, the real hard pan that they would drive their carts on or walk on. Other [seeds] would fall among those rocks the [farmer] had stacked up to clear the field of rocks. Others would fall among the weedy places—maybe places that were never plowed over the years—and [there were] weeds growing in the corners or perimeters [of the field] also. So the seed would fall in those places. Most of it, though, would fall on the good soil. Then when the rain would come, it would sprout and bring forth a crop.

It could have been that somebody was sowing seed or plowing a field right as Jesus was teaching this. Very likely the people were all gathered, thousands of people were gathered, and Jesus when says, “A sower went out to sow,” everybody says, “Yeah, we know about that.” This is what He said in Luke 8:5–8:

The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and

choked it out. Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.” As He said these things, He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

We are going to look at the interpretation of the parable in a minute, but let me just point out a few things here. Notice that Jesus mentions four kinds of soil. Three of the soils actually germinate some seed, but only one of the soils out of the four produces a crop. And it is a huge crop, a hundred times more than what was sown. Finally, Jesus calls out for those who have “ears to hear.” He says, “I want you to hear.” Now, that is an interesting statement. We’ll talk about that, too.

Keep in mind that Jesus is not giving a lecture here on the fundamentals of agriculture; He is teaching a spiritual lesson. He wants us to understand spiritual truths and so He is teaching a spiritual lesson to those who have “ears to hear”—a certain subgroup of this huge multitude that is out there. You may be asking yourself, “Why would Jesus teach in parables in the first place?” If you think about it, that’s kind of a cryptic way to communicate. You can just imagine after the service today, I’m standing in the foyer or I’m up front here and you come and ask me a Bible question and I give you a parable. You [say], “What’s that supposed to mean?”

The whole point is that parables obscure the truth; they are riddles. They are hard to understand. So the disciples [are probably] thinking, “OK, you’ve been going around, you’ve been preaching the gospel in all these cities, you’ve been doing miracles, and now you teach a parable. Why are you doing this?” They have the same question we have.

This brings us to our first point: You can’t understand God’s word apart from God’s grace. Look at Luke 8:9: “His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant.” This should make us feel good as we look at parables and say, “What does that mean?” They understood the literal meaning; that was not a problem. But they were thinking, “OK, who is the sower? Who is the seed? What do these different soils mean? What is He

talking about?” Look at verse 10: “And He said, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.’” Now just stop there. This verse is loaded. As a matter of fact, I was tempted; I wavered on doing a whole sermon on verse 10. But we are going to do it in short order because we are going to encounter more of this.

He says to the disciples (notice that the disciples questioned Him), “To you (believers, to you who believe in Me,) it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” The word “granted” means to give a special blessing—to grant to somebody or to bestow upon somebody or to hand somebody some sort of gift, or blessing, or special thing. In this case, it is “to know”—not intellectually, there is a word that talks about a kind of logical knowledge. This is more than a mental knowledge. This is to *intimately* know something. As a matter of fact, in the Greek version of the Old Testament this word is used of a husband and wife having intimate knowledge of each other. It is a knowledge that is experiential, relational, and very intimate. That’s what He is talking about. “To you, a blessing has been given that you might experientially, intimately know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.”

The word “mysteries” is another key word. It is a word that describes those mysteries, those truths that cannot be understood apart from God’s intervention—apart from His grace. You remember Daniel, in the book of Daniel, chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has this dream of a statue with a head of gold and the arms and chest of silver and the belly and thighs are bronze and on down [see Daniel 2:31–33]. He has this vision and it’s a mystery to him. In the *LXX*, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament, [Daniel] uses the same word “mystery” over and over again. Of course, Daniel then is called forth, he receives the information from God about the mystery and its meaning, and then he reveals it to the king [see Daniel 2:31–45]. That’s exactly what Jesus is talking about here. He’s saying, “To you, my believers, to you disciples, it has been by divine favor granted to you, to have an intimate and experiential knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” Not everyone receives this: just those who have “ears to

hear”—spiritual ears. Jesus wasn’t saying, “Those of you who haven’t had your ears cut off or hacked out.” He’s saying, “No, those of you who have ears—that is, the spiritual understanding to know what I am saying—let him hear.”

Notice that Jesus didn’t call everyone aside and explain the parable to them. [He only explained it to] the disciples. The rest are out there thinking, “I wonder what that was about? Of course we know that sowers go out to sow, seed falls in different places, and some bears fruit and some doesn’t. So what?” They are all out there thinking, “Did we come here to hear this?” They don’t know. Other people are out there thinking, “Oh, wonderful!” They are out there thinking, “What’s wrong with you [who don’t understand what He’s saying]?” But Jesus says in the middle of Luke 8:10: “To the rest it is in parables.” In other words, “I am going to explain the spiritual significance of My word to those to whom it has been granted and to those to whom it has not been granted, it’s going to remain a mystery. They will not have that intimate, experiential knowledge of My word.”

I don’t know about you, but does that seem strange to you? That Jesus, who came to be a light in the world, would hide His light from people? That seems strange to me. Why would God do this? It just doesn’t seem fair that God would reveal His truth to some, but not to others. That’s what a lot of people say: “That doesn’t seem fair.” You know what? It’s not. But whenever you ask for fairness, do you know what you are asking for? Justice. Justice is fair. Believe me, you do not want to be asking God for justice. When you are a sinner, you don’t want justice—what you want is mercy and grace. Mercy and grace are both *unearned* and *undeserved*. That is, you can demand justice from God and you *will* receive it, but you cannot demand that which you do not deserve, right? When God gives people the understanding of His word and grants them the ability to know the mysteries of His kingdom, that is an act of His grace. That is not something we deserve. We do *not* deserve it.

I know other people are not greater sinners than I am. There are people who are far smarter than me—people who have greater gifts, greater talents,

and greater speaking abilities. There are people with greater fame and greater fortune. The questions are: Why me? Why you? There are a lot of people out there who don't know Christ, who don't know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, so why would God grant it to you? Here's the answer: The Bible doesn't say. It just says it's true. Knowing and experiencing God's word is reserved for those who have been saved or those who are being drawn by God's grace to repentance and faith in Christ. The rest get it in parables. That is why when you share the gospel with some people they look at you like, "This is a joke." Other people break down crying, give their life to Christ, and walk with the Lord until they die.

Notice what Jesus says at the end of Luke 8:10. He quotes a portion of Isaiah 6. He quotes verse 9, but He leaves out verse 10. He says, "So that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Mark includes [a portion of] the rest of Isaiah's statement which reads, "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed" [Isaiah 6:10]. Mark translates "healed" as "forgiven" [see Mark 4:12]. God, speaking through Isaiah, says, "I want you to hide my truth from these people so they will not be forgiven and saved."

That is a mystery to some people who want fair[ness] and who don't understand what fair[ness] is. Why doesn't God allow His truth to be known to everyone? Here is the answer: Judgment. *Judgment*. God judges people by not granting them the ability to know His truth.

Turn to Matthew 11. This is a prayer that Jesus uttered. As I read this prayer [out loud], I want to encourage you to ask yourself if you have ever prayed anything like this before. When I was reading this I was thinking, "I've *never* prayed anything like this before." See if you have. Matthew 11:25-27:

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and

the intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Have you ever prayed that? “I just praise You, God, that You have kept the truth from those people.” I’ve never prayed that. Jesus praised God for that truth.

Turn over to Acts 16. There is a little verse there: Acts 16:14. Paul has set out to sea from Troas, according to verse 11. Then he went to a place I can’t pronounce [Samothrace] and then to Neapolis, then to Philippi and then the district of Macedonia, to a Roman colony. He stays there and he preaches there. Acts 16:14 reads: “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” Did you see that? Paul was preaching the gospel and here is one of the clearest verses that says what happens when someone gives his life to Christ. God reaches into the person’s life through the Holy Spirit and He opens the person’s heart so that he can understand the things spoken.

Paul talks about this in great detail in 1 Corinthians 2:10–15. We don’t have time to go through the text, but in verse 12 he says, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” This teaches that the Holy Spirit is behind all of this. We have received the Holy Spirit so we can know the things given to us by God. That is, know His word. In verse 14 he says, “But a natural man,” (or the unsaved man), “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” He cannot understand them.

This is the doctrine of illumination—the doctrine that God, by His Spirit, through His grace, grants to His elect the ability to understand His word.

No matter how well you preach the gospel, no matter how slick you are at sharing with somebody, no matter how good you are at arguing or how excellent you are at oratory or persuasive arguments, I'm telling you, you cannot grant people illumination ever, *ever*. It's nothing you can *ever* do. It is only something God does. Only something that He does of His own accord by His own will according to His grace and mercy.

Why do I tell you this? Because it should help you relax a little bit. When you are sharing the gospel with somebody, don't fret and worry, [saying to yourself], "They didn't come to the Lord. Maybe I should have given them another [Bible] verse." Listen, you will never be able to save *anybody*. You will never be able to grant anybody illumination. That is a work of God and God alone. It is your job to share the truth. It is God's job to make it living and active in people's hearts and bring them to salvation through it.

It should also remind you to pray. Pray hard that God would grant understanding to people. When you share the gospel you should be praying while you are sharing, "Lord, help them understand this. Open their hearts. Give them illumination. Make Your Spirit move within them."

Finally, it should make you praise God—if you know Christ, because you are one of the choice, the select few—that God by His grace has granted to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

There are a lot of guys and gals out there who are Hebrew and Greek experts—they spend their whole lives studying the Bible. But I'm telling you, if you came to Christ yesterday, you know more in this matter than the greatest unbelieving Bible scholar in the world. They have never experienced the truth. They don't have the intimate knowledge of the truth.

Some people don't understand how, when you are studying your Bible during the week or having your quiet time or something, and you find this passage and say, "This is so cool! This is so cool! Look at this, look at this right here!" They are looking at you like, "What's wrong with you?" Have you ever experienced that? This is a common occurrence with new believers. All they know is they were blind and now they can see. So they go home to their unbelieving families and say, "Mom! Dad! Look at this! Let me

read it to you!” They read it and their family says, “So?” Their family is totally unmoved. The [new believer] says, “What’s wrong with you? Look right here in Philippians,” or “right here in Romans,” or “I read this,” or “Isn’t this wonderful?” That is God’s Spirit working in [the new believer’s] heart. There, for the first time, having that experiential knowledge of the truth that the word is working on them, they know it. They are intimate with it. Unbelievers never have that *at all*.

This is what the Scriptures teach. God, by His Holy Spirit, invades a person’s life and opens up the word. And, wow! It just hits you. It hits you. I’m telling you, every believer knows this. If you don’t know this, it’s because you don’t know Christ. Because this is what happens: God grants this to His saints. So you should praise God for that.

Secondly, you need to ask yourself this: Is your heart like the hard pan of the road? Look at Luke 8:11. After Jesus explains that understanding His word is a gift of God, not a work of man, He says in verse 11, “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.” Immediately we realize that Jesus is talking about preaching the word. As a matter of fact, Matthew includes in 13:37 [of his Gospel] that, “The one who sows . . . is the Son of Man.” Luke leaves that out, but the principle is that anybody who shares God’s word is sowing the seeds of God’s word. Jesus, of course, explaining His ministry to the disciples, calls Himself the sower, but it is anyone who proclaims God’s word.

Look at Luke 8:12: Jesus begins by explaining the seed sown by the road, or sown on the road. Those beside the road are those who have heard. Just remember that Jesus is going to use this phrase every time. All these different kinds of soil hear the word with their physical ears, but there are only some who have “ears to hear.” Though they all hear, [there is a] select group who has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God—they can hear with spiritual understanding.

What happens to the word of God when it is sown in a heart that is hard as a road? Look at the middle of verse 12: “Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart.” Notice that Jesus is talking about hearts

here. He is not talking about soil. He is talking about hearts—hearts that have the word of God shared with them. He says that when you have a hard heart the birds pick [the seed] up. The birds represent Satan, who snatches away the word of God from a hard heart. Jesus doesn't explain how Satan does this. He just says that he does do it.

Why does Satan do that? Why doesn't he just leave it there in that hard heart? Well, look at the last part of verse 12: "So that they will not believe and be saved." No one gets saved apart from the word of God: no one, ever. There is bad teaching out there today that says, "You can just have good intentions and be saved." No, that's not what the Bible teaches. "You can be sincere in your worship of bugs and be saved." No, you can't. Paul, in Romans 1:16, says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." It doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Greek. If you are going to believe it's because of the gospel. It is the [gospel] and the only power of God.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18 [it says], "For the word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." James, in James 1:18, says, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." He brought us forth by the "word of truth." He caused us to be born again by the "word of truth." I think Peter probably was thinking of the parable of the soils when he wrote this in 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." That is the only way anybody ever gets saved: through the preaching and teaching of the gospel—through people reading it, hearing it, watching it lived out. The gospel is the only way. It is the *only* power.

Years back, Lisa and I were trying to witness to this guy who was a bachelor. We had had him over multiple times; so we talked to him a little bit about the Lord. He knew I was a pastor and so it was obvious I was religious. We had dinner and we were talking with him, asking him about

his life, and then he said, “So, tell me, what does it mean to be born again?” *I love that!* If you could have seen my carotid artery, it was throbbing. I was trying to maintain my cool and not just jump down his throat! “Well, let me tell you!” It was shocking. Usually [you start by saying], “do you go to church. . . ?” and “if you died. . . ?” You kind of have to pry people, and wrench them to the place where they even want to listen to the gospel. This guy just said, “What-does-it-mean-to-be-born-again?” Lisa and I said, “We want to tell you.” So we did for about an hour and a half. We told him everything; we gave him a whole class in soteriology. We just dumped on him. And you know what? He was interested. He asked a few more questions and after we were done, it was apparent that he was just like, “Well, that’s was interesting.”

A few weeks later, I went to help him work (he was remodeling his house); and we were working and he stopped right in the middle of the project and he said, “So, Jack, what does it mean to be a Christian? How do you become a Christian?” I was thinking to myself, “I just told you! Were you there at our house? That was you on the couch, wasn’t it? That wasn’t your twin!” And you know what? It became obvious as I started talking to him that he had no recollection of that. It was like his mind was erased. I asked, “Do you remember when you were over at our house?”

He said, “Yes.”

“We were talking on the couch about what it meant to be born again?”

He got this [look of], “Tell me again. . .”

This is what Jesus is talking about. What you need to ask yourself is, “Do I have a hard heart?” Is your heart like the hard pan of the road? Maybe you come to church out of habit because you did as you were growing up. You have some guilt and you come to church thinking, “Maybe this will make God relieve my guilt or whatever. I’ll sing a few songs, throw some bucks in the plate, and get convicted by the sermon.” But your heart is as hard as granite, and you have determined not to be moved. You know what sins are in your life, and before you even pull in the parking lot you have made up your mind; you are not giving this area of your life over to God.

Oh, He can have a little bit of your time—you'll sing some hymns, you will give a little bit of money—but you are not going to let Him rule your life.

And so, though the word of God may convict you a bit, it just lays on the surface of your heart. Well, I'm telling you if that's you, by the time you drive out of the parking lot, the birds will come. They will snatch [the truth] away. I don't care if we sowed a whole sack of seed in your heart. It all gets gobbled up. The pigeons of hell come swooping down, pick it all up, and there is nothing there. "Who is God to think He can control every area of my life? I haven't murdered anybody. I've been a pretty good person. You know, I'm going to church. I'm doing a lot of things right, but He can't have everything. Who does He think He is? God?" Yeah, He knows He is. But you don't; you think *you're* God. That's your problem.

If that's you, I warn you that you are in very grave danger, *very grave danger*. When you come to church and hear the word of God preached and sing praises, you are being told truth. Seed is being sown in your heart right now as I speak. Every time you reject it, your heart gets harder and pretty soon it becomes like polished granite. There is no chance that seed is going to get in there, unless God brings in the jackhammer. By His grace, He does—there have been many people who have been ground to dust so that the seed could be sown, and it's painful. If that's you, you need to repent, you need to believe in Jesus Christ, you need to confess your sin, and you need to give your all to Jesus. Give everything to Christ, turn from all of your sin and receive Him as the Lord and Master of your life to follow Him from now on to all eternity. Take up your cross, die to self, and follow Jesus [see Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23].

Third, is your heart like rocky soil? Look at Luke 8:13, where Jesus explains that, "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy." There's a certain kind of religious person who is very excited, very emotional, very thrilled about Christianity for a time. Maybe he grew up in a pagan home and he didn't know anything about Christianity. He had heard about it; he knew there were churches out there, but he never really had a Christian talk to him. He had never really been to

church. Maybe some hard times had come into his life, and he thought, “I’m going to run to church and get some comfort.”

Church is like a social action group. You just go there—people are nice and kind of moral—and some people come into the church and are thrilled! They are thrilled! Nobody is smoking in the foyer, or drinking, or cussing. They are nice to you. They want to be your friend. [These new people] hear encouraging truths from God’s word. It’s great! It’s thrilling! They have this very emotional, joyous response. You know what? These are the kinds [of people] that deceive us the most because we think, “That person has come to Christ and they have come to Christ *hard!* Look at how excited they are. They are involved in everything!” But listen: never confuse salvation with excitement. Some people get excited for a time. It’s fruit that you need to look for—persevering fruit.

Look at the middle of Luke 8:13, “And these have no firm root.” Plants need roots, don’t they? They need them. Try this: next Christmas, go to the Christmas tree lot—pay too much. (When I grew up—I was on the border of the forest service—I just hiked up with my snowshoes, cut one down, and dragged it home. Now every time I go there, they want \$100 for a dead tree. You have to go through this big mental thing. “Oh, Dad, it’s Christmas time. . .”) Just get that Christmas tree and plant it in your yard. Watch it grow. For a while, it looks like it’s alive. It looks like it’s going to make it. Then all of a sudden it starts getting lighter green, and then brown, and the needles fall off, and it’s dead. It has no root. That is what Jesus is talking about here.

Notice what Jesus says at the end of verse 13: “They believe for a while, and in a time of temptation fall away.” This is not saving faith. They believe like demons believe. They believe like Judas believed. They believe like those disciples who were thrilled at Jesus’ miracles, but as soon as He made some hard calls in their lives, they quit following Him. These are people who believe with their minds only. They intellectually agree that these things are true. They may be very passionate about them for a time. They are thrilled to learn some new things about Christianity, but eventually, when temptation

comes, their favorite sin comes calling and they have to choose between Christ and their life of sin. They turn like “‘a dog returns to its own vomit,’ and, ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire’” [2 Peter 2:22]. They tried out Christianity for a time.

If you’ve ever talked to anybody like that, [who says], “Yeah, I tried out Christianity.” What? No, you didn’t. You can’t “try out” Christianity. You either become a Christian or not. You may have tried out going to a building where the Church meets, but you haven’t tried being a Christian. When their old sins come knocking at the door, their true allegiances are revealed and they fall away. The Greek word is “aphisteimi.” It’s the negative of “phisteimi,” which means “to stand firm or hold firm.” “Aphisteimi” is the negative of that. It means “to not stand firm, to not hold firm, to fall away, to apostatize, to become faithless, to reject what you once appeared to stand for.” They become apostate; they walked away from Christ—maybe not with their words, but with their life, with their heart.

I feel for parents because of this very thing. There are so many parents I talk to who had a child who “used to” follow the Lord. At one time the [child] made a profession. He grew up in the church—of course, because his parents were in the church. He came to church every Sunday—of course, because his parents made him. He went to youth group. Yes, because his parents made him. But as soon as he got out of the house, he got out of Christ. He ran away. You hear the [parents] say, “Oh, yes, my son is saved. I know he’s been living in immorality for ten years, but he loves the Lord.” Not! Not! “My daughter is saved. Now, she doesn’t go to church and she doesn’t read her Bible, and yes, she’s involved in a lot of wicked activities, but, you know, when she was little, you should just hear her pray.” No. *No*. Parents do not like to think of their children being children of Satan on their way to hell. Parents cannot endure the thought that their child is on his/her way to hell, so the [parents] lie to themselves. Frequently they do this. They lie to themselves to comfort their own hearts.

Parents, listen to me, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice and follow Me” [see John 10:27]. That’s what Jesus said. [He also] said, “He who loves

me keeps my commandments” [see John 14:21]. Paul said that “if anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed” [1 Corinthians 16:22]. Don’t lie to yourself anymore. Those who hate God, hate God. That’s how it is. So instead of encouraging [your child], “I know you are saved, but you have just fallen away for this brief twelve-year period.” Just tell yourself the truth. These people don’t love the Lord. They are the seeds sown among the rocky soil.

There is only one thing worse than being an unbeliever—a hard-pan person—and that is having come into the church, having received God’s truth, having spent time fellowshiping with believers, and then rejecting [it]. That is worse, so you need to tell him the truth. “Listen, I know you think you are a Christian, but you’re not because the word of God says you’re not. I know you think that your life growing up in the church is going to get you into heaven. It’s not. You are on your way to hell. You need to repent. You need to believe. You need to give your life to Christ.” Tell him the *truth*. Peter, in 2 Peter 2:20–21, says:

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. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

There is only one thing worse than being an unbeliever and that is being an unbeliever who has been exposed to the truth and the fellowship of the saints. Those people don’t need encouragement that they are still saved; they need to be evangelized! *They need to be evangelized!*

John, in his first epistle, warns, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God” [1 John 3:10]. He’s not talking about sinless perfection; that’s not what we are talking about. No one is sinless. He’s talking about those

who know Christ, [who] are progressing toward Christlikeness. Yes, we fall. Yes, we have periods of ups and downs when we are doing better or not doing so well. But, over the course of our lives, God, who promised to perfect us until the day of Christ Jesus, is doing that. If He wasn't, He would be a liar! And He can't be a liar!

So if that is not happening in someone's life, it's because he *doesn't know the Lord*. And so, when you get to a person like that, don't say, "Well, you know, I know you are saved, honey, but you need to *return* to the Lord." No, he needs to turn to the Lord for the first time. He needs to experience the life-changing truth of God's word and be saved. So keep witnessing to him. Keep praying for him. Don't give up. If he is living for self and Satan, he isn't living for God. He isn't God's.

Four: Is your heart like weed-infested soil? In Luke 8:14, Jesus says, "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity." Along the edge of the field, the farmer might accidentally throw some seed in areas he didn't plow—areas that the weeds grew up in, have taken over, and [where they] have sprouted their own seeds. All that seed has fallen on the ground and is just waiting for the same rain that the good seed is waiting for. The difference is that weeds are native to the soil [on the edge of the field]. *They are vigorous*. It's their perfect environment. So here's mister poor, little, wheat grain surrounded by the thistles, the melba weed, the spurge, and whatever [else] is crowded around it. As soon as the rain comes, those [weeds] jet out of the ground. They're taller. They're stronger. They're faster growing and the wheat starts to sprout and it's just choked out. It never produces, never even begins to produce a crop.

The weeds in this [part of the] parable represent sin that Jesus defines in three ways. The first, He says, is "worries." This is a word that might be translated as "fretting," or "being fearful," or "being anxious," or—in the common, modern-day vernacular—"stressing out." People say, "I am so stressed." I feel like saying, "So, you are in so much rebellion against God?"

Stressing out is sin. Anxiety is sin. Fearfulness is sin. Worry is sin. There are some people who are worried about everything. They are like Martha: worried, worried, worried. “I’m worried about my car. I’m worried about my job. I’m worried about my kids. I’m worried about my relationships. I’m worried about my plasma TV or the one I wish I had that I don’t have. I’m worried!”

That kind of life chokes out the word because God gives you all these promises. “I will never leave you. I will take care of you” [see Hebrews 13:5]; “My grace is sufficient for you” [2 Corinthians 12:9]; “I am sovereign.” But when you worry, you fret, and you are anxious, what you are doing is denying God’s promises. You are denying His sovereignty—you are denying that He is in control. You are denying that His grace is sufficient for you, that He is in total control of everything that has happened to you, that He knows exactly what is going on, and that He’s going to use this for your good. You are denying it all. [The sin of worrying, fretting, and being anxious] chokes [the promises of God’s word] out.

If you want to do a good study, do a study in Psalm 37. The whole psalm is about this. Psalm 37:8 says, “Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.” That’s the only thing it leads to, “evildoing.” You remember in Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus, talking to the multitude there, says, “Listen, don’t worry! *Don’t worry!* Your Father knows what you need! He says, “Look at the grass out there . . . is it doing OK? Sure, it’s doing OK and we are going to cut that grass down and throw it on the fire. Look at the birds. Are they fretting? No, because God takes care of the grass. God takes care of the birds. Aren’t you worth way more than birds and grass?” And the answer is, of course you are. He says, “Don’t be worried about your life, what you are going to eat, what you are going to drink and your clothing.” He says, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and these things will be added to you” [Matthew 6:33].

Paul in Philippians 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” He goes on to say, “God’s peace will come over you.

Don't fret, don't worry, and don't be anxious" [see Philippians 4:7]. There are certain kinds of people—you sow these promises of God in their hearts and these great truths in their hearts—but they are anxious, they worry and they leave. Pretty soon, they are so consumed by all these things that they don't have control over, that all those things overwhelm the word and choke it out. They can't even remember the promises anymore.

The second kind of weed [in Luke 8:14] is riches—the pursuit of riches, the love of riches. It is the golden weights that have sunk many people to hell. "I'm going after the god of gold, riches, and more money. I need to make more money, so when I die I can leave more behind." Paul, speaking to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:10, says, "For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." That is, they have impaled themselves. That's exactly what Jesus is talking about. "Some by longing for [money], have wandered away from the faith." That is, they have come in contact with Christians. They are starting to be exposed to Christianity and then, "Hey! Money!" The job, the opportunity, lures them away. They turn their backs on God because of their greed.

The third kind of weed Jesus mentions [in Luke 8:14] is the "pleasures of this life." There are a lot of ideas out there in the world, and even among Christians, that being a Christian is just nothing but pleasure. There are a lot of pleasures associated with being a Christian. "God has a wonderful plan for your life." Not if you're an unbeliever He doesn't. He has a *bad* plan. But even if you *are* a believer, you need to keep in mind that at times you are going to be persecuted, you are going to be rejected, you are going to be ignored, you are going to be passed over for that job, or made fun of, or slandered. There are some, in learning about Christianity, who just mock you.

Paul told the believers in Acts 14:22, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Does that sound fun? Paul told Timothy, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" [2 Timothy 3:12]. Does that sound fun? Philippians 1:29 says, "For to you has been

granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." *That* is Christianity. Some people, they just don't want it. They don't want the persecution. They don't mind salvation, they don't mind the hymns, they don't mind the encouraging part—but when it comes to standing up for Christ in the world and receiving licks because of it, that's it for them. "I'm leaving. The Christianity thing is OK for some, but I'm not going to be a *martyr* for Jesus."

Fifth, is your heart like good soil? This is the encouraging part. Finally we have some soil here that is going to produce a crop. Luke 8:15 reads, "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." Here we have a heart that has been plowed up by God's grace and the rocks have been removed by the rake of God's mercy. It's been fertilized by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. When the seeds sown in a heart like that are watered with honesty, and heated with the sunshine of goodness, they sprout, their roots go deep, they grow up strong, and they produce a crop. [The heart] holds fast the word. All the other examples don't. In one example, the birds pick [the seed] away, in the other it dries up, and the other it's choked out. This is the *only* case where the word is held fast, and the only case where there is fruit—"fruit born in perseverance," Jesus says.

There are some who say, "You don't have to produce fruit to be a Christian." Oh, really? [They say], "If you say that, you are adding works to the gospel." No, you're not. You aren't adding works to the gospel if you are talking about what happens after someone's saved. We aren't saying that good works earn you the right to be saved. What we are saying is that when you are saved, you will produce good works. The Scriptures are clear about this.

I think there is a real fear in some people because they have sons and daughters and loved ones that they don't want to think are going to hell. The [son or daughter or loved one] made a profession of faith for Christ at one time and now he is living for sin and Satan. [Yet], people want to believe that [that person] is saved; [but they don't want to think about the fact] that

if he had to produce fruit, and he didn't, that he wouldn't be saved! The question is, what does the Scripture teach?

Look back at Luke 3:8–9. See what the word says, with John the Baptist speaking:

Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father,” for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

How many trees that don't bear fruit? All of them that don't continue to bear good fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire.

Turn over to Luke 6. If John the Baptist doesn't work, look at what Jesus says here in Luke 6:43–45:

For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For 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. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

This is obvious: when God invades the person's life, when He grants him illumination, when He saves him, causes him to be born again, made into a new creature—regenerated—[the person] begins to change. God perfects him until the day of Christ Jesus. Again, we are not talking about sinless perfection. We are talking about the pattern of someone's life. There should be a pattern in every believer's life where he becomes more godly—sins less, obeys more, and produces more fruit.

Turn over to Luke 13:6. Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree that teaches the same lesson. True believers produce fruit and if they don't, they are judged. He says in verse 6:

And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

In other words, we are going to give it the benefit of the doubt, but, you know, after four years of no fruit there, it's a bad tree.

Remember what Jesus said in John 15. [He] tells the parable of the vine and the branches. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" [John 15:1]. He goes on to say that those branches are gathered together and they are pitched into the fire—[those] that don't bear fruit. In verse 16, [He says,] "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." Notice that when God saves somebody He appoints him to bear fruit: fruit that remains. If that isn't good enough you can look at Romans 7:4–5, or [Romans] 15:28, or Galatians 5:22, or Ephesians 5:9, or Philippians 1:11, or Colossians 1:6, or Hebrews 12:11, or James 3:17–18, or Jude 12. All [of these verses] use fruit figuratively to describe good works in the lives of believers.

So what does this tell us? It tells us this: When someone is saved, he *necessarily* produces good fruit. Maybe not a lot at first, maybe very slowly, but he does. And if there is no fruit, if there are no good works, if it doesn't remain, it tells us that he doesn't know Christ because God's word isn't

lying to us. He's telling us the truth. So if you look at your life right now and you realize, "I'm not producing any fruit. I come to church, but I'm not producing any fruit. I don't love the Lord. I don't read my Bible. I can't remember the last time I actually got my Bible out and had a quiet time." No fruit. "I don't serve in a ministry." No fruit. "I don't love the Lord." No fruit. You need to give your life to Christ. You need to repent and believe. That's why Jesus came. He came to die for people who are fruitless to make them fruit bearers for Him and His glory.

You don't have to go out and get all psyched up and try to be really good so God will accept you. He'll accept you right now in your rebellion. He'll accept you as a sinner. He came to justify the ungodly. Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners [see Romans 5:8]. He'll accept you—wretched, unclean, a sinner. He will wash you. He will cleanse you. He will make you into His child. He will transform you. He will open your heart. He will give you His Spirit. He will perfect you until the day of Christ Jesus if you are willing to turn from your sins, turn to Christ, receive Him as your Lord and Savior, believing and trusting in what He did alone on the cross to save you.

For the rest of you who know the Lord, I would encourage you to keep sowing seed. *Keep sowing seed.* God will use it. It will sprout and it will bear forth fruit as God wills, and in the hearts of those He wills, and it will bring forth a crop. Pray hard, share the gospel, and trust God for the results. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this text. What a great passage it is, just to learn about why some people come to the Lord and some people don't though both hear the same message. We know it's an act of Your sovereign grace to grant people illumination and yet You have called us to be part of the salvation process in that we are sowers of seed. I'm afraid, Father, that many of us have large sacks of seed [that are] sewn shut. Father, I pray that all of us would be bold and courageous and with our deeds and with our words that we would proclaim Your truth to a lost world that they might know You, be saved and produce fruit for Your glory. We thank You for saving those

You have. Open the hearts of those who don't know You. Father, bring in a great harvest. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

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