

July 6, 2008  
Pentecost 8

*"What to Expect When God Sows the Seed"*

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**MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23**

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**T**hat same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear." <sup>18</sup> "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. <sup>22</sup> The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

It was an amazing day for Jesus when he stepped out of the house where he was staying and sat down along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd of people gathered around him. In fact the crowd became so large he had to sit in a boat that was probably pulled up along the shore so people could hear him better. At one time over 5,000 people followed Jesus and tried to listen to what he had to say.

Large crowds do not equate with large numbers of people coming to believe and accept the message of salvation. Jesus told the story of a farmer sowing his seed in a field to illustrate for us that some will reject the word of God immediately, some will get excited at first but then lose interest and some will have their faith choked by thorns and thistles of this life. But always there will be those who are like the seed grows in good soil and bears much fruit. Jesus told us this parable or story so we would not get discouraged when we see people turn their backs on the Word.

This coming week we are going to plant the seed of God's Word into the lives of children who come to our Star Bible Camp. We don't know what the results will be, but God does. He already sees those in whom this Word will grow and bear much fruit. At the end of June we went LWMS Convention in Tucson. I saw a young woman who once attended a Vacation Bible School we conducted in Santa Barbara. She is now a very faithful member bearing fruit for the Lord in our fast growing congregation in Boise, Idaho. We want the seed of the Word to grow and produce fruit in people everywhere. We also want this to happen in

our own personal lives.

### **Some falls on the hard path**

Jesus told the story of a farmer who went out to sow his seed. As he cast the seed to the wind, some of it fell along the path and was eaten by birds before it ever had a chance to send roots down into the ground. When I plant seed, I carefully take the seed and plant it into the ground. At Jesus' time the farmer took the seed and threw it to the wind, hoping that most of the seed would fall into the loose ground he had worked up with his plow. Some of it was bound to fall onto the path where it was stepped on and eaten by birds.

Jesus explains how the Word of God can be immediately rejected and never take root in their hearts. "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart." The natural human heart is like hard ground or a hard path. It hates the message of the kingdom of God, because this message teaches we cannot save ourselves. It teaches that God's love rescues us by sending Jesus to make the full payment for ever sin. This message makes it clear that we cannot contribute anything to earn God's favor and win his love for us. The human heart hates this message and the devil seems to be very successful at getting people to immediately reject the Word and stubbornly resist letting it grow faith in their hearts.

Satan is still very much alive and well in these last days of life on this planet earth. He loves to distract people when the Word of God comes into their lives. Have you ever read the Bible and after reading you asked yourself, "What did I just read? Why did I let my mind wander off?" Or have you ever found yourself thinking of what you need to do this week, even as God's Word comes to you in worship or in a sermon you hear preached? Why is it that we have a new law forbidding us to use our hands to hold a cell phone while we are driving? Accidents happen when we are distracted. Satan works hard to distract us from the Word. That is why it helps to pray for help to read the Bible or pray for help to hear the Word when you come to worship the Lord as you are doing this morning.

### **Some withers from shallow ground**

Let's watch the farmer as he throws out more of his seed. Some of it falls on shallow ground or rocky soil. Because the soil was shallow it sprang up quickly as it was warmed by the sun in the moist soil of summer. As soon as the summer heat came, the seed begin to wither because it was not deeply rooted. So it is with people who have only shallow roots in the Word of God. They appear to be so excited and so on fire for the Lord at first, but then their enthusiasm quickly fades. Here is how Jesus explains it. "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." I read just recently about the life of Ted Turner from CCN and Turner broadcasting. He was once a devout believer, and even wanted to become a missionary when he was a teenager. But then he lost someone he dearly loved and God did not answer his prayer for healing. So he turned his back on God.

Jesus never told us to take up our pillow and follow him. He told us to take up our cross and follow him. There will be hard times for Christians when we need more of God's Word

not less. It is during these hard times that we need the Holy Spirit to root us deeply in the Word so that we can say with Paul, "I know that nothing in all creation will ever separate me from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord." As the fire burns in Big Sur some of the large redwood trees will survive the fire, because they are deeply rooted in the ground, and their roots have found their way into the water of springs and streams that come out of the mountains. Psalm 1 says, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither." The number one goal in your life and mine needs to be having more time with the Word each day so we can be deeply rooted in Jesus not just people of shallow roots.

### **Some is choked by weeds and thorns**

When I look back at the years the Lord has allowed me to serve as a pastor, some of the hardest times in the ministry have come when we see people fall away the Lord and the rich blessings they have in him. Jesus had the same experience with one of his disciples named Judas. It should not shock us when some of the plants that look so healthy are choked by thorns and thistles and other weeds. Jesus said, "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants." See the seed fall in the ground. See it grow and flourish. It is so healthy and so vibrant and so alive. But look more closely. See that little plant growing next to the plant. It is just a little thistle, but how rapidly it grows and chokes out the life of the seed that has been planted.

Jesus explains how this happens. "The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." Hard times can threaten the life of faith, but equally dangerous are the good times when prosperity comes to us and the blessings the Lord gives us become more important than hearing the Word and growing in our faith. The time devoted to the pursuit of material prosperity and its enjoyment can lead Christians to have less time to be alone with the Lord in his Word.

A young man confessed to his pastor that there was a time in his life when he was spending up to eight hours a day playing video games. He said that he felt guilty and ashamed for wasting so much valuable time in his life, ignoring even his family and friends, and having little time to read the Bible or pray. Maybe you feel pretty good right now because you certainly don't spend that much time playing video games, or watching television or surfing the web. Certainly you have not allowed yourself to be deceived by riches so they take up so much time that you have no time left to be alone with the Lord and let him speak to you. The words of Romans 2 come to mind, "You therefore have no excuse, you pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself." Whether it is newspapers, television, computers, games, or just running around town and getting things done, we struggle to manage our time so we have more time to be alone in the Word. The Savior who has died for all your sins, has also died for the times we have been like Martha who was worried and troubled about many things, but missed out on what was most important, time to be with Jesus in his Word. It is scary to think of how fast the thorns and thistles can grow in our lives and choke our faith that needs to be nourished by the Word!

### **Some produces abundant fruit**

I am so thankful we can end this sermon this morning talking about how some seed produced an amazing crop. "Still others seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." It is amazing how much fruit, or vegetables or grain can come from one seed that takes root and develops into a full grown plant. Always there will be those whom Jesus said will hear the word and understand it. The Holy Spirit opens the heart to believe. People who were dead in sin become alive in Christ and bear fruit out of love for him.

Some years ago I met a man while flying from Milwaukee to Denver. He lived in Seattle and told about his friend's wife who had a job as an office assistant but was a multimillionaire. When she first started to work for two fellows named Bill and Paul, they could not afford to pay her in money so they gave her stock options in their fledgling software company. Her stocks in Microsoft started by Bill Gates and Paul Allen were worth millions of dollars.

Even the smallest investments in God's Word each week and each day will produce tremendous dividends in your life. It will be crop yield a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Such is the power that God has put into this seed, the seed of his Word, the Holy Bible. As Jesus tells us, "He who has ears, let him hear." Amen.