

August 7, 2011
Pentecost 8

"Don't Be Surprised by Different Reactions to God's Word"

MATTHEW 13:1-9 AND 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ 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."

The book of Matthew tells us that Jesus went into the cities and villages teaching people the good news of the kingdom of God. He talked to people about how he was their king and how he had come to rescue them from their sin and bring them into God's kingdom of unfailing love. Not everyone accepted Jesus' special message about love. In the previous chapter we hear how some of the people said he was from the devil. Even Jesus' own brothers and sisters rejected Jesus at first but later came to believe in him.

Jesus was not surprised by this rejection. He even anticipated this would happen when he said, "Narrow is the way that leads to eternal life and very few will find it." It should not surprise us when people we know and love want nothing to do with the message of God's love found here on the pages of the Bible. To help us anticipate the different ways people will react to God's Word, Jesus tells us the parable or story about the sower and the seed. Some of the seed is snatched away before it grows. Some grows briefly until it is scorched by the heat. Some grows well at first but then it is choked by thorns and thistles. Always there is the hope that some will grow and produce a good crop.

Some is snatched away

The farmer who sows the seed in the field always knows that some of it will never sprout and grow. It may even be eaten by birds shortly after it hits the ground. "A farmer went

out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell always the path and the birds came and ate it up." Little birds have very good eyes. They can see the worm crawling on the ground or the seed that sits on the hard path. They swoop down from the tree, and in the blink of an eye they eat the seeds or take them away to their nest.

Jesus tells us that Satan can do that with God's Word. "When anyone hears the message of about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart." People have a hard time grasping the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus saw this first hand. He went into the towns and villages preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. There is not a religion in the world that comes near to teaching what Jesus teaches us about the kingdom of God. Every religion in the world teaches that you can be loved by some god if you try to do what is right and follow the ways of that particular God. Only in the words of Jesus and the Bible do you discover a teaching that says all your best efforts to please God and make up for the bad you have done wrong fall short of his glory. Only in the Bible, God's Word, do you find the teaching that God sends his Son to remove sin from us and replace our sin with his righteousness so God can accept us and love us with this deep, intense personal love. Satan will snatch this beautiful message of love out of the hearts of people just as the bird eats the seed on the path. The gospel of John tells us about this rejection of Jesus that will take place where ever the message goes. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not recognize him."

But wait a minute. Let's not fail to apply these words to our personal lives also. You are reading the Bible, and you become distracted by other thoughts. You may have ever read through a whole chapter and then asked yourself, "What did I just read?" When you sit down to read the Bible, ask for the Lord to help you keep your mind focused on what you will read so the devil does not snatch the precious seed from your heart and life.

Some is scorched by heat

Let's get back to Jesus story about the seed. "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered, because they had no root." The seed sprouts and the plant starts to grow. It loves the warm sunshine and draws moisture from the ground. It is a happy plant. But then the sun gets hotter. There is no rain. The shallow, rocky ground quickly dies and the poor little plant withers and eventually dies.

Jesus uses this illustration to show what happens to people who joyfully hear the word of God but then fall away when the going gets tough. "The one who received the seed on that fell on the 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." If I base my faith in my feelings and emotions it will be shallow rooted faith that will not survive the test of persecution in the last days. If my faith is based on the Word of God and its promises, then it has the strength to survive the most difficult days that may be ahead. Such faith leads us to believe words such as, "So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Nothing will change your life more than the Bible. Here in God's Word you will discover how deeply corrupted you are inside. You will see things wrong with yourself you have never seen before. You will be led to believe that there is no hope of saving yourself. But then what peace and joy will come to you when you realize that Jesus has done it all for you. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith (declared righteous) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The closer you get to this peace you have in Jesus, the more you will walk in conflict with the world around you that wants nothing to do with this peace and love. Jesus talked about taking up the cross and dying to ourselves as we follow him. It cost you nothing to become a Christian but it will cost you everything to continue to be a Christian. Psalm 1 says this about being deeply planted in the Word. "He is like a tree planted by the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither."

Some is choked by weeds

You see that healthy plant grow over there. But get a little closer and see all those little weeds growing near the plant. The good farmer knows that with time, the weeds will grow faster than the plant and even choke it to death. "Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants." Jesus tells us how this happens when the seed of God's Word is planted in the lives of people. "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."

Jesus often told stories about money. He told the story of a rich man who could care less about a poor man named Lazarus who was dying of starvation on the street next to his large house. He told another story of a rich man who had to build bigger barns to store his crops, who boasted of enjoying his wealth, but that night he died. Jesus warned about not letting the worries of this life so consume us that we forget our heavenly Father is taking care of us. He showed us the birds of the air and told us to watch how our heavenly Father takes care of them.

This past week we took another hard hit in the stock market. Countries in Europe are scrambling to keep from plunging into a financial crisis. Are we in a double dip recession or even on the cusp of another Great Depression? The report from your doctor is not good. You are worried about your kids and how they will fare in life. The cares and worries of life can choke off the time we have in God's Word. Even the good times may not be so good for us if they choke off the time for us to be in the Word.

Here is a good check on how weedy your soil is. Ask yourself what is preventing you from having that time alone with God in his Word. Is it the television, your hobbies, your reading, your habits of life? Satan eagerly desires to turn you into an ABC Christian (anything but church). He loves to choke us with the cares and worries and even the joys of life.

Some grows and produces fruit

We are so blessed this morning to hear Jesus tell us that where ever his Word goes it will produce some fruit in the lives of people. The Lord tells us in Isaiah 55: "My word

shall not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which it was sent." God wants all people to be saved. He brings salvation to people through his Word. "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears to hear let him hear."

Jesus explains the good soil with these words, "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." The investment of time you make in being alone with the Lord in his Word will produce tremendous blessings in your life. The word will bring you close to love of God and the blessings you have in his kingdom.

The farmer takes the plow across the field. He breaks up the soil. He provides a place where the seed can fall into cracks in the ground and germinate and grow. The Lord your God has changed your heart and led you by his Holy Spirit to accept the Word he has planted in you. He has nourished and strengthened your faith in his love for you. You have found that the promise in Isaiah is true for you. God's Word does not return empty. It accomplishes what God desires. Listen to this prayer in Ephesians 3: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge." Take the time to be alone in the Word of God. The Lord will draw you close to the good news of his Kingdom where his undeserved love and kindness last forever. Amen.