

Christ Encounters the World

Lesson from the *Parable of the Sower* – Mat 13:3-23

- Its meaning is revealed to the disciples, not to the crowd – the moral principle is for believers
- It describes the Word of God going out into the world and how it is *received*. The seed is the same in each instance. There isn't good seed and bad seed in this parable (see Matt. 13:25 for the parable of the tares in which bad seed is sown among the good seed). There is only good soil and bad soil, good conditions and bad conditions in which God's seed is either fruitful, or unfruitful.
- Seed sown on good soil *will* produce a crop 30/60/100x what was sown
- We can identify ourselves as Christ's by being fruitful *through perseverance* (Jn. 15:8). A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree *cannot* produce good fruit (Mt. 7:18). But "make a tree a good tree and it will produce good fruit" (Mt. 12:33). We are called to be fruitful, to bear good fruit that will last. *Then* the father will give whatever we ask for in Christ's name (Jn. 15:16).

1. ***This is not a parable about salvation.*** It is a parable about usefulness and preparation. It is about spreading the Word of God to usher his kingdom into the world. It directly corresponds to the parable of the oil lamps (Matt. 25:1), the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14), and Christ's teaching about pruning the fruitful branch (Jn. 15:2). When we are called, we are called to be fruitful (Jn. 15:16). The purpose and attractiveness of the fruits in Gal. 5:22 is to ensure that the seed contained in those fruits is taken to spread the seed of God's word. Fruit is not an end in itself. If the branch does not produce fruit, then it is cut off and thrown in the fire because it is not in keeping with its nature. Our nature is changed in Christ. Our root is different. We either live by the Spirit, or we continue to live by the Flesh, making a lie of our holy and graceful root. If the *root* of a tree is not good, then it must be cut down (Mt. 3:10). It isn't that the graceful tree, the believer, is torn from the kingdom, but that a different tree has found its way into the vineyard. Its root is not holy and graceful. It is the root of an unbeliever. It has no right to be in the Garden of God, no matter how beneficial its shade or how pretty its shape. It is cut down and burned. Its fruit, or lack of it, has revealed its true nature. It *cannot* produce good fruit.

We don't need to be afraid that we are the fruitless fig tree which was cursed by Christ, even though it was out of season. First, the lesson was about faith, not salvation. Second, it wasn't that it had no fruit in the season in which he sought it. It *never* had any fruit. Though in full leaf (mature), it did not have a single fig. Fig trees produce figs. This produced *nothing*. By definition then, it was not a fig tree, or it was not a good fig tree. It was diseased. Christ cursed it because it was evil, and as proof, it withered right to its roots (Mt. 21:19-21; Mk. 11:13-21). If its root was holy, it would have remained. In the *parable* of the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), the owner returns each year for three years to see if the tree yields any fruit. The keeper of the vineyard asks for one more year to dig around it, fertilize it, and water it and perhaps next year it will be fruitful. If not, he will cut it down. Same idea. Work out your salvation in fear and trembling (Php 2:12-13).

Remember the tares in the wheat field: they *cannot* produce wheat (fruit) because they are not wheat. It doesn't matter how long we wait. They are destined for the flames. It is their nature. At harvest time they will identify themselves by their false fruit. The winnowing fork is

in his hands. But we are believers. Our nature is holy. And we produce good fruit from a good tree with holy roots. The seed in the parable of the sower “*fell*” on these various soils. It wasn’t planted there. We cannot make ourselves be in the right place at the right time for the seed to bear fruit. It simply says that if we are good soil, and the seed falls on us, we will be fruitful. If we are not fruitful, then we are not good soil.

2. As *believers, we not only sow the word, but we are the good soil in which God's Word grows.*

As sowers, we need to understand that not all the seed we sow will take root, nor thrive, nor produce a crop. But we sow it anyway. Because we believers are the good soil, this parable can apply as much to the seasons of our life as it does to the world – God’s seed continues to fall in each season to produce each season’s crop. We are productive in some seasons, and not in others depending on when and where the seed of God’s Word has fallen. If our soil has been tilled, and fed, and watered, then we will be fruitful in our season. We cannot allow ourselves to be choked by the thorns of life. We are fed by the Word of God, and we are watered by our ongoing relationship with the Spirit of God. It is our duty to till our soil and pull up the weeds of sin daily by the power of the Spirit. We are called to be fruitful, not only displaying fruit on our branches, but reproducing the seed of God’s Word in the lives others. They in turn will produce fruit and crops in abundance. And that brings us back to what the parable of the Sower is all about. We have a huge harvest coming, and the workers are few. We have been given something, entrusted with something, that will make us useful in the fields. Recall the parable of the talents. What have we been given that is like the talents? We have been given the following:

- the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven (Lk. 8:10)
- the fullness of Christ (Col. 2:10)
- our daily bread (Matt. 6:33)
- what to say (Matt. 10:19)
- the kingdom of God (Mt. 21:43)
- authority to overcome the power of the enemy (Lk. 10:19)
- the sacrifice of Christ’s body (Lk. 22:19)
- living water (Jn. 4:10)
- prayer (Jn. 15:7; Lk. 11:1, 18:1)
- whatever we wish (Jn. 15:7) so that we bear much fruit
- the Word of God (Jn. 17:14) which is the “seed” of this parable
- glory (Jn. 17:22)
- the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32)
- a task and a ministry of reconciliation (Acts 20:24, 2Cor. 5:18)
- faith (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:8,9)
- grace (Rom. 12:6)
- a trust (1Cor. 4:2)
- freedom (Gal. 3:22)
- help (Ph. 1:19)
- strength (1Tim. 1:12)
- wisdom (James 1:5)
- new birth into a living hope (1Pet. 1:3)
- great and precious promises (1Pet. 1:4)
- the command to love one another (1John 4:21)
- the testimony of God (1 John 5:9)
- eternal life (1 John 5:11)
- understanding (1 John 5:20)
- authority to judge (Rev. 4:20)

These talents were given to us for a *reason*. Look at the list and ask yourself the following questions, “Why have I been given these? What am I to do with them? How can I turn a profit with them, just as my master would have done if he had not left? What will I have for him when he returns?” This is not about salvation. It is about our usefulness to God. To whom much is given, much is expected (Lk. 12:48, 16:10). All the riches and all the resources listed above are

fruits of the seed of God's word. And they in turn will produce an abundant crop from the seed contained in them, *if* we persevere.

“Whoever *does not have*, even what he has, or thinks he has, will be taken from him” (Lk. 8:18). This has nothing to do with believers. Branches which produce any fruit at all are *not* cut off and thrown into the fire. They are *pruned* so they will be more fruitful (Jn. 15:2). To whom has been given anything at all, more will be given. This is talking about resources that need to be used effectively. None of the servants in the parable of the talents had anything of their own. They were all given money that belonged to the Master, just as the seed of God's word belongs to God and the graces or gifts of the Spirit are variously given according to his determination (1Cor. 12:11). With that money two of them produced a profit using their own abilities. They had produced a “crop” of their own. Now they would be entrusted with even more. As for the one who had nothing of his own to show at the end of the allotted time, even what he had was taken from him – it was taken because it didn’t belong to him. It *never* belonged to him. And that’s why he was thrown out into the darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He proved that he was *not* his master’s servant. He did not serve his master’s interests. He did not belong in his master’s household. You cannot lose your salvation. *The question is whether you have it.*

The disciples as well as the crowd are told to be *careful* how they listen. They must listen with open hearts, and they must listen with the intent of putting it into practice. The disciples have been given something extra: understanding. They need to recognize the value of what they’ve been given. They need to do something with the truth of it. Christ’s mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. And that’s the whole of it. This isn’t about being saved or not saved, having salvation or losing it. It’s about making use of what you’ve been given. Yes, there are two peoples. One belongs to God and the other to Satan. That’s a fact. But it is not the moral principle embodied in this parable. It is not the focus of the lamp on the lampstand. It does not speak to the question of whom Christ’s brothers and sisters are. We have an obligation to usher in the kingdom to the world. And we have been given everything necessary to accomplish that task. What are we doing with what we’ve been given? Christ is our mentor, our teacher, our example, and our Savior. What did he do with what God gave him?

The Parable of the Sower sets the stage for Christ’s encounter with the world. He describes in the parable what effect the Word of God will have on the people who receive it. He describes what we need to be like to have God's Word grow in us and make us fruitful. We don’t sow seed once for all time. It is an annual event. The soil that was rock strewn last year may be tilled this year. The weeds and thorns at the beginning of the season may have been pulled leaving good soil behind. What wouldn’t grow before may flourish now. And therefore we sow our seed in its season, and we harvest our crops in their season, year after year, until we have an abundance. This is how we encounter the world. Christ did not visit one town one time. He visited the same towns over and over, talking to many of the same people over and over, until the seed of his word took root in them. They in turn sowed seeds into their friends and families, until the multitudes descended on Christ. Sowing seed is an act of faith. But it is also an act of obedience, and a labor of love. And that’s how Christ encountered his disciples in the storm, and calmed them just like he calmed the storm. That’s how he encountered the man called “Legion”

and freed him. That's how he encountered the disease of one woman and the death of a little girl, overcoming them both using what God had given him.

When the boy with falling down fits could not be cured by the disciples, Christ must have been frustrated with them because they did not use what they had been given. They were not prepared for the encounter. When asked why they could not drive out the demon, he says to them, "This kind only comes out by prayer" (Mk. 9:29). And again he says, "Because you have so little faith" (Mt. 17:20) Prayer and faith are given to us for a purpose, but his disciples were unaccustomed to using them. They were not disciplined in their exercise. And therefore they were weak and ineffective as they encountered the world and its evil. Christ was a master of both. And he was fruitful in his season. What does "fruitful" mean? There are very few passages of Scripture to describe it. The following are characteristic:

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Ps 1:1-3 NIV

"In that day-- "Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it. I am not angry. If only there were briars and thorns confronting me! I would march against them in battle; I would set them all on fire. Or else let them come to me for refuge; let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me." In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit." Isa 27:2-6 (NIV)

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." Prov 11:30 (NIV)

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Luke 3:8 (NIV)

What seems clear from these passages is this. **Fruitfulness**, producing a crop that is 30, 60, and 100 fold what was sown, **is the result of who you are, not what you do.** It is *not* the measure of how many people you bring to Christ, nor how evident your fruits of the Spirit are. If your roots are holy, you will yield a holy crop. And if your roots are evil, you will yield an evil crop. There are no other kinds of roots, no other natures, no other trees, and no other fruits anywhere in Scripture. If you are a child of God, then you will evidence His grace in your life; you will display the fruits of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22); and you will yield your crops in their season. It is your nature to do so. Your soil is good soil and the seed of God's word will grow in you and produce fruit after its kind. Your branches, like the branches of Christ's church, will spread and the birds of the air will come to nest in its shade and feed from its fruit.

The only issue is whether, in this season of your life, your soil has been tilled and fed, and your tree has been watered. The seed has already been planted and has taken root. You already confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your faith has already been expressed in your baptism. Your hope has already been placed in him. *You are a tree of life in this dying*

world. Is your tree strong, healthy, and fruitful in keeping with repentance? If it is not, then why is it not? It can only be caused by a lack of righteousness. Your delight is not in the Lord and his law. You have not found your refuge in him. You are not prospering because of this rebellion. If this is you, you *still* have hope in Christ! Confess your sins, repent, seek peace with God, and he will be a consuming fire to destroy the thorns and briars confronting you! Your tree will yet prosper in *everything* you do. It was Christ's practice daily to pray to, and to strengthen his faith in his father. Because he was disciplined in these practices, he was filled with power and with the Spirit, to bear fruit that would glorify his father in heaven. He is our model. He is our example. He is our hero, and our God. *Imitate* him! *Love* him through imitating him. *Glorify* him through being like him – it is enough to be *like* the teacher. It is your nature. Live according to the Spirit, not the flesh (Rom. 8:4). You have been given everything necessary to do that. Make use of what God has given you. Here then, is Christ encountering the world as our example:

Jesus calms the storm: there are 2 key phrases here. The first is by the disciples, “We are going to drown!” They have become prophets, not with a word of faith from God, but with a word of doubt and fear from Satan. And Christ therefore confronts them about their service. “*Where is your faith?*”

The demon-possessed man: he pleads with Jesus not to torture him. The demons beg not to be thrown into the abyss. They know this is the Son of God, but they don't really know him. They too speak out of fear and ignorance. Jesus is merciful to both. The demons will have their punishment in due time. But this man they have possessed will have his freedom today, immediately. The effect of his freedom is profound: He clothes himself, regains his faculties, and sits at the feet of Christ. The herders respond to this miraculous change with fear, not delight, self-concern, not praise of God. Christ departs from them. But to the man who has been freed, Christ gives this command: “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” And the man obeyed. He was fruitful in this season.

The bleeding woman: Jesus was on his way to someone else when this woman reached out to him. She fought her way through the crowd to touch him. She was healed by the mere touch. Christ stopped. He turned. He sought her out in the pressing crowd. He knows what has happened. She knows she has been found. She explains her behavior and her hope in Christ. And Christ therefore blesses her with this: “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” He has identified her as his child, closer than a brother or sister because she has acted on her faith in him, and received healing.

Jairus' daughter: Jairus, hearing his daughter is dead, succumbs to his fear and despair. Christ encourages him with this command: “Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” Jairus hears and obeys. He believes Christ. And as Christ comes to Jairus' daughter, he calls her his child as well. He orders her to rise up. Her spirit returns and she stands. He asks her parents for service in return. They obey, because what better service can there be, what greater delight, than to bring nourishment to their daughter who was dead, and now lives again. Of these, Christ commands silence about the event.

Remember: some are given one duty, and some another. Not everyone has the same lesson to learn, nor the same response to give.

Questions for personal growth –

When you encounter Christ:

- Do you seek out Christ as the only one who can help you, like the bleeding woman did?
- Do you believe Christ when he tells you the impossible, as Jairus did?
- Do you exercise your faith, or do you fear as the disciples in the storm did?
- Do you do what he asks of you, as the demon-possessed man did in spreading the Gospel?

When you encounter others:

- Do you see their true condition, or only what appears externally?
- Do you stop what you're doing and give them 100% of your attention?
- Do you meet their needs because you have margins in your life of time and money?
- Do you encourage and bless them, edify and uplift them to fill them with joy?
- Do you enable and empower them to serve?