

Last fall in our Tuesday Evening Bible study we concluded our study in the book of Acts, which we said was the history of the early church. It begins with the ascension of Christ, then the Day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit on all the early believers, the early growth of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then basically the ministries of Peter first, and then the Apostle Paul. We also saw some of this when we studied the persons of Peter and Paul, which we concluded this past week in our Tuesday Evening study.

As we looked at their ministries we saw that they were very active in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter had his own journeys, but Paul, who was one who had persecuted the church, then began to proclaim the gospel in most of the known world. And as we saw through the Book of Acts multitudes believed. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, as our Savior had commissioned him, traveled thousands of miles to bring the good news of the Gospel.

However, for the multitudes that did believe, there were also probably greater multitudes that did not believe. Peter had opposition and was arrested and imprisoned. And even in our Epistle Lesson for today we read of some of the tribulations of the Apostle Paul and the multitude of persecutions that were part of his Christian life.

Listen again to some of those words recounting what the Apostle Paul went through from 2 Corinthians 11:24-28:  
*“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”*

So, why do some people believe and many do not? Why is the truth of the Gospel absolutely clear to some, and to others they cannot see the forest for the trees? Why do some respond to the absolutely clear teaching of the Gospel and others do not? Why do people follow sham religions and cults such as Scientology, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam and Mormonism, among others?

The Billy Graham Evangelistic association, which has been faithful for preaching the gospel for over 50 years says that their statistics show that of all the millions of people who have come forward at their crusades, only about 5% continue on with the faith that they profess. That is a lot of people, but still it is only a small percentage. Why?

The answer is seen in our Gospel lesson from Luke 8, so I ask that you turn with me there. This is one of what is known as the Kingdom Parables – that is our Savior talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. We looked at one last week in the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

The particular parable before us, the parable of the sower is one that is found in the three synoptic gospels – that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are called synoptic – which means “same eyes” – because they basically cover the same events, that is, the whole life of Christ, whereas the Gospel of John spends more than half it’s time on the last week of our Savior’s life. But, the repetition of this parable in the three Gospels tells us how important this parable is.

As we see in our parable, our Saviors gives the parable and then takes his disciples aside and explains not only the parable, but also the purpose of the parable.

Our Savior talks about sowing seed and the four types of soil that it lands on. In those days, the farmers would sow the seed and then plow it under. That which fell on the paths through the fields would not be plowed under, and therefore was wasted.

Other seed, according to our Savior would be sown on rocky ground where there is no moisture, other seed would be sown where there is thorns which would choke it when it grows and lastly, some seed would be sown on good soil, where it would bear fruit.

Now comes the really hard part, as our Savior explains why he has spoken in parables – Luke 8:9-10 (READ). This is made even more clear in the parallel passage in Matthew, where it tells us that it is all a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.

Listen to these words from Matthew 13:10-17: *“And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

Again, and this is the hard part – Jesus spoke in parables so that some wouldn’t hear and understand. What we see here is the grace of God in those who believe. We see clearly the doctrine of election, which many try to minimize or negate. The ability to understand the message of the gospel is a gift from God.

We saw that last week and if you look closely at the scriptures, you see it from the beginning to the end. Again, consider our memory verse this week from Titus 3 and the one quoted last week from Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* And notice also the hymns that I choose for today, look closely at the words.

And so that brings us back to our Savior’s explanation of the parable beginning at verse 11. He makes it very clear that the seed is the Word of God. And the Word of God can fall on four different types of soil or ears and hearts, if you will.

The first is that which is scattered by the wayside, on the path as it were, where it will have no opportunity to be plowed under. So he says: Luke 8:12: *“Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”* These are those who reject the gospel outright – they say “don’t bother me with this drivel.” They really cannot hear the Word of God because God has not opened their hearts and ears.

The second type of soil is that which is rocky – there is no depth to it. Luke 8:13: *“But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.”* These are those, who for example in a time of emotional stress, accept the gospel, but

then when the stress goes away, so does their “faith.” This is why they say that there are no atheists in foxholes.

The third type is that which is sown among the thorns and are choked. Jesus calls it the cares of the world. Luke 8:14: “*Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*”

In real life these are those who make a profession of faith, may be active in the church for a while, but then fall away. They get consumed by the world, maybe they make a lot of money and start enjoying the pleasures of life rather than God.

Then the last group is those to whom God has chosen – and the seed falls on good ground. It bears fruit – meaning these people worship God, they study the Word of God, they are active in the church and they persevere to the end. These are those whose heart and ears have been opened by the Spirit of God to the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the good news – that he came, lived, died and rose from the dead for the sins of those who believe in him.

Now, you might ask me, what does that have to do with me and my Christian life?

First, if you believe, then you must be thankful – remember, God has chosen you. That is why, for example the song “I have decided to follow Jesus” is theologically incorrect. It really should be God has called me to follow Jesus.

Second, as you witness to others about Christ, remember you are not responsible for the results. When people do not respond to the gospel, we often think that it is something that we said or didn’t say, or how we approached them. And while we sometimes do things wrong, we have to remember that we are not responsible for the results. God is. It is God who by His Holy Spirit calls people to Himself.

So, as we think about those we love – family members, friends, co-workers – it is our responsibility to tell them that Christ died for the sins of those who believe him as Savior and Lord, but it is God who needs to move His Spirit in their hearts so that they can receive the truth of the Gospel and then bear fruit. And that is what we have to pray for.