

God's Word Gives the Increase

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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 NKJ On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ "And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ "But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" . . . ¹⁸ "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ "yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Many of you are farmers and gardeners. How many of you plant your seeds the way this man does?

If I were to ask some of you to come up and speak about how this man might be a better farmer, I'm sure there is a lot you could say. Not least of which would be not to try to plant seeds on the road.

Of course, Jesus is not concerned about planting corn but about planting faith. He is not concerned about growing soybeans but about growing his kingdom. However, there are still some who approach this parable with that attitude of how can we be better sowers. How can we be more efficient in sharing God's word? How can we make the seed grow?

That is not the point of the parable. Learning modern farming techniques is great for farmers, but when it comes to preaching the word Jesus is clear what our job is. It is our job to sow the

seed. It is our job to throw it this way and that regardless of whether soil is rocky or weedy or hard packed dirt. We sow God gives the increase.

Jesus tells his disciples and us in:

Mark 16:15 Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

That is exactly what Jesus described here a man who is sowing the seed, that is preaching the gospel everywhere he goes. He is unconcerned about where it lands because as Paul reminds us it is not we who cause growth but God.

1 Corinthians 3:7 ⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

God Gives the Increase

The power of life is not found in the technique of Sower nor in the ground. The power of life is in the seed. It is not the skill of the Sower, nor the faithfulness of the ground which causes the seed to grow. The power of life is in the seed and from God who causes it to grow. Just so the power to grow life in us is not the skill of the preacher or our own strength, the power is in the word and from God who causes that word to grow.

At the same time Jesus makes it clear that where faith does not grow and produce the problem is not in the seed but in the ground. The power is in the seed, the problem where there is a problem is in the soil.

Thus we receive in this parable first a promise of what God can do in our lives and second warnings about the attitudes in our own hearts.

One of the warnings here is against false enthusiasm. The faith of the rocky ground died because it had no roots. False surface emotions are not going to get the job done.

We heard in our OT reading that God's word brings joy.

Isaiah 55:12 ¹² "For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

Writing about that same passage Luther states:

"When joy is missing, we conclude that faith is lacking, while in the presence of joy we see the power of faith. It is not, however, the joy that characterizes the Enthusiasts."

God's word does give joy, but what Luther is saying is that it is not the joy which necessarily results in dancing and standing in a meadow with your arms raised.

Consider the following verse from the prophet Job: "I know that my redeemer lives." How does it make you feel? Does it give you joy?

Consider the emotions and facial expressions of the prophet Job when he uttered it. Do you think his face was beaming? Do you think he was dancing? Probably not. But was he joyful? Yes

There is a joy which causes dancing and there is nothing wrong with that, but there is another joy which sits deep in the heart even when there is great trouble on the surface. Job who was in great sorrow and pain still had strength and even joy deep down. You can cause it faith or trust or joy but whatever word you use its is a heart that finds comfort in God's promises.

Jesus is reminding us in our parable today that the surface emotion is nothing without deeper roots. The joy of the enthusiast cannot sustain the believer over time, only when God's word sits deep in the heart will faith remain through troubles.

Jesus also warns against the deceitfulness of riches. This is the seed that lands in the midst of weeds.

One of my favorite authors once wrote, "greed for a good purpose is still greed." We could also say "greed for little things is still greed. Or we could say "greed for food is still greed."

There is little in this world that is more deceitful than the allure of riches.

Study after study has shown that more wealth does not give you a better life. It does not make you healthier. It does not give you more friends. It does not make your marriage better. It does not make you happier.

Yet despite the overwhelming evidence we are all of us convinced in our hearts that if we had just a little more money everything would be fine, everything would be good, we would be happy. We are convinced in our hearts that this warning doesn't apply to me. I don't want to be rich I just want enough to do this or enough to do that.

The allure of riches is not usually Satan telling us to worship him and he'll give us fifty million dollars. More often it is a desire for just a little more. And this desire for a little more leads us a little farther from our focus on Christ and his word.

Happiness comes not from what we have but from contentment in Christ.

"Godliness with contentment is a great gain."

So then when we pray, we ought not to pray "give me this one thing Lord and I will be content," but instead, we should pray, "give me contentment Lord and I will have all I need."

It is the power of God that gives the increase both in church and in our personal lives.

God's word causes the growth.

Many years ago when I vicared in Colorado I saw a thing which I later learned is called virga. The rain comes down but the air is so dry that it evaporates before it reaches the ground. You can see it raining above you but you are not getting wet.

When I saw this I thought immediately of our Old Testament reading. "The rain does not return until it waters the earth." Is God's word wrong?

While it is true that the rain does not at first reach the ground. It would be untrue to say that it has no effect. The quick evaporation of so much water can cause a rapid decrease in temperature, which can produce a downdraft, which often brings the rain down to earth. So that in a sense the rain beats at the air until it finally has the desired effect of watering the land.

Rather than denying God's word this ultimately underscores the truth of our passage from Isaiah. Even though it may not look like God's word is accomplishing anything, still the power of his word is at work.

God's word will accomplish his purpose. Our job is simply to sow the word in our lives and in the lives of others. Amen.