

Having pondered the rapid loss of Gospel seed, sown fruitlessly on the hard-hearted as “seed sown along the path,” we turn to the second soil which withers without a root in these further notes on the Parable of the Sower. May the Lord deepen our faith by reminding us of the deep roots of God’s grace which unite us to Jesus Christ – thereby protecting us from the rootlessness which characterizes so many in our day. May we not only hear the Gospel, but receive it in a deep work of grace, wrought upon our hearts and souls by the Holy Spirit.

**Monday: Read Matthew 13:18-23**

**Outward Religion**

The first soil proves impenetrable to even the mere hearing of God’s word because there is a willful blindness and inability to hear or see the things of the Kingdom of God. As Jesus says (Matthew 13:15), here is a hardened unbeliever, *given over by God* to a complete hardening as a punishment for refusing to even hear the Gospel. Such hard-heartedness produces an *inability to understand* the Gospel and a *mental blindness* to it.

There is a second kind of soil which initially “receives the word of the Gospel with joy” (Matthew 13:20), appears to believe it, and even produces the fruit of an outward profession of faith. Such people will come to church to enjoy the fellowship of God’s people and the light of God’s word, but in the end lack “the root of the matter.” They have no heart conversion; no new birth by the Spirit of God, and therefore no eternal life. The seed withers.

There are many tragic pieces which play a part in this withering of outward religion. For today, let us simply respond with a holy fear of having merely a lip religion. As Jesus says of such an external religion – “Such people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Is 29:13).

**Meditate and Pray:** Lord and Giver of Life, we long to thoroughly experience your life-giving Spirit in every corner of our lives. Do not allow us the outward ritual without the inward change of heart which marks true conversion. Help us to live the words of this hymn about the inward root of grace which must mark our lives. Please “breathe upon us,” O God (Hymn # 334):

*Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Fill me with life anew,  
That I may love what Thou dost love,  
And do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Until my heart is pure,  
Until with Thee I will one will,  
To do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,  
Blend all my soul with Thine,  
Until this earthly part of me  
Glows with Thy fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,  
So shall I never die,  
But live with Thee the perfect life  
Of Thine eternity.*

**Tues/Weds: Read Matthew 13:18-23**

**The Deep Work of Real Repentance**

Verses 20-21 show us the deep instability of the outward professor of religion. As long as the Gospel message brings comfort, joy, friendship and even social success, with the benefits of a loving church community, the seed appears to bear fruit in this kind of person in terms of enthusiastic agreement with the things of God.

But when trials and even persecution come, sent by God to test and try the reality of such faith, the shallow root withers under the heat of such tests. There is a complete change and departure from what appeared, from the outside, to be a credible profession of faith. Such soil returns to its natural, fallen state of rock-hardness and non-receptivity to the Gospel.

**Meditate and Pray:** Can you think of examples of such withering under the trials of life? Have you known folk like this? Scripture does not fail to provide us with examples. Think of Simon Magus, who tried to buy the miracle-working power of the Apostles with money, and of whom Peter says in Acts 8:21-22, “ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.”

And what about King Saul, who was concerned with having public “photo ops” with the godly prophet Samuel, valuing as he did mere outward ritual and sacrificial meals, but whose root sin of disobedience to the Word of God resulted in his being “given over” to the voice of demons in 1 Samuel 28? The end result was that “God became Saul’s enemy” in 1 Sam. 28:16.

In all such cases, the initial embrace of the things of God withers. Such people “taste of the heavenly gift and of the power of the age to come,” but in the end prove impervious to the deep work of real repentance (Hebrews 6:5-6). Ask the Lord to give you the joy of that real work of grace which marks the Christian, using hymn # 330:

*Holy Ghost, dispel our sadness;  
pierce the clouds of nature's night;  
come, thou source of joy and gladness,  
breathe thy life, and spread thy light.*

*Author of the new creation,  
come with unction and with power.  
Make our hearts thy habitation;  
with thy grace our spirits shower.*

*From the height which knows no measure,  
as a gracious shower descend,  
bringing down the richest treasure  
we can wish, or God can send.*

*Hear, oh, hear our supplication,  
blessed Spirit, God of peace!  
Rest upon this congregation,  
with the fullness of thy grace.*

#### **Thursday: Read Matthew 13:18-23**

#### **Deep Roots**

God-sent trials are designed to prove the reality of true conversion. Jesus identifies such times as “tribulation or persecution on account of the Word” in verse 21. While it is easy for false believers to maintain a religious interest when the “weather is fair,” things can change when it costs to follow Christ. When the unbelieving loved one puts their foot down, when the godless employer demands that we forsake all semblance of a public witness for Christ, at such times the trial of true faith comes to the fore.

But let us not miss the encouragement of this second soil. The promise implied in Jesus’ words is that, when there is a root of grace, when we are able to say along with the weak and failing Apostle Peter, after he denied Christ three times: “Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you,” we can be assured that the root of our new life in Christ will endure. Such an inward assurance of the reality of God’s grace in our hearts, though we are weak like Peter in so many ways, means that, *no matter what level of persecution comes our way; no matter what level of personal fear may grip us before the hostilities of the world, the flesh and the devil – no one will be able to separate us from the root of God’s love in our lives!*

**Meditate and Pray:** Let us thank God for His promise that “nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.” Sing about this assurance with the words of this paraphrase of Romans 8:34ff:

*The Savior died but rose again  
Triumphant from the grave;  
And pleads our cause at God’s right hand,  
Omnipotent to save.*

*Who, then, can e’er divide us more  
From Jesus and His love;  
Or break the sacred chain that binds  
The earth to Heav’n above?*

*Let troubles rise, and terrors frown,  
And days of darkness fall;  
Through Him all dangers we’ll defy,  
And more than conquer all.*

*Nor death, nor life, nor earth nor hell,  
Nor time’s destroying sway,  
Can e’er efface us from His heart,  
Or make His love deca*

**Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 13:18-23 and Psalm 139:1-10 & 23-24      A Comforting Assessment**

Let us rejoice this weekend as we savor one of the most powerful ways in which God preserves us from the condemnation of an outward religion. He does this by pressing upon us the reality of His Divine omniscience of our every thought and word. In terms of Psalm 139, when we realize that, “Before a word is on our lips, God knows it altogether” (Ps. 139:4), such knowledge ultimately drives us to pray in verses 23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

In other words, God’s omniscience prompts us to seek God’s examination of our lives now, in order that we would be saved from the terrible exposure of the hypocrite on the Last Day. Boast though he might of his good works done to please the eyes of men, his rootless religion will never survive the white-hot trial of God’s all-knowing judgment on the Last Day (Mt. 7:21-23).

How much better to request God’s assessment now, since we know so little of our own deceitful hearts. He who knows all about us can examine us and save us from the sins we don’t even realize we could commit. He is ever present with our traitorous hearts! He knows our thoughts long before we do. Let us ask Him, as the puritan John Owen urges us to do (Vol. VI pg. 176), to undertake this work of thoroughly testing, cleansing and forgiving us of the sins we don’t even know reside within our hearts!

**Meditate and Pray:** Sing with thankfulness from Psalm 139 about God’s omniscience, from hymn # 36:

*Lord, Thou hast searched me and dost know  
Where’er I rest, where’er I go;  
Thou knowest all that I have planned,  
And all my ways are in Thy hand.*

*My words from Thee I cannot hide,  
I feel Thy power on every side;  
O wondrous knowledge, awful might,  
Unfathomed depth, unmeasured height.*

*Where can I go apart from Thee,  
Or whither from Thy presence flee?  
In Heav’n? It is Thy dwelling fair;  
In death’s abode? Lo, Thou art there.*

*If I the wings of morning take,  
And far away my dwelling make,  
The hand that leadeth me is Thine,  
And my support Thy power divine.*

*If deepest darkness cover me,  
The darkness hideth not from Thee;  
To Thee both night and day are bright,  
The darkness shineth as the light.*