

We turn once again to Christ's teaching on the Kingdom of God, likened in Jesus' parables to the sowing of good Gospel seed. Only God can create true faith by pulling out the weeds of unbelief from our hearts. He is the omniscient Farmer who can sow the good seed of His Word in our hearts. At the same time He gives power to His Spirit to change the soil of our hearts from evil, hard, unfruitful and even dead ground into fruitful hearts of faith – by His sovereign grace alone.

Mon/Tues: Read Matthew 13:18-23**Protection from Anxiety**

In the Parable of the Sower, the first soil proves impenetrable to even the hearing of God's word. There is a willful blindness and inability to hear or see the things of the Kingdom of God. The second soil "receives the word with joy" in Matthew 13:20-21, appearing for a time to believe it, but in the end lacks the root of saving grace. There is no conversion, no new birth by the Spirit, and no eternal life. The seed withers.

What then can we say this week about the third soil described for us in Matthew 13:22, which ends up being choked to death by covetousness and the cares of this life? Well, first off, as in the first two soils, such a choking to death of the young plant of an outward profession of faith proves that *none* of these first three soils describes a real, saving faith. They are pictures of those who "taste of the Heavenly gift, and of the powers of the world to come," as Hebrews 6 puts it, but never by faith "swallow" the Gospel message to the salvation of their souls. In short, the weed-choked ground, as the shallow and hardened soils before it, are all descriptive of the *unbelieving response of Israel* to Jesus Christ. Though they were drawn to Him for His miracles and the power of His teaching, they never embraced Him as their Savior and Lord.

But does this mean that, as true believers, this weed-choked ground has nothing to teach the believer? Far from it, for the same sinful tendencies reside in our hearts as in the breasts of the unbeliever and must be mortified progressively by the Spirit of God (See Romans 8:12-13). We must be watchful against the distractions and cares of this life, as the many warnings against such sinful cares prove. How do Psalm 37:1-2 and 7-8 put it?

Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb. **(Ps 37:1-2)**

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm. **(Ps. 37:7-8)**

Amazing, isn't it, to hear how these words from the Psalmist address the very heart worries which can embitter and harden us over time? Here is the lesson of how to protect ourselves from the soul-destroying anxiety which can make us unable to hear the word of God and its reassuring promises: we must fill our hearts and minds with the holy expressions of anxiety in the Psalms. We must seek to "roll our burdens" of anger and frustration with how this world short-changes us, therefore, onto the massive shoulders of our God.

Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your
righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. **(Psalm 37: 5)**

Meditate and Pray: Lord, when we are consumed with sadness because of our trials, and feel unjustly treated by this world, and even ignored by your own people, (both kinds of abandonment were something which David the Psalmist knew), help us to cast our cares upon you, remembering the promise of Psalm 55:22 that you indeed care for us. Help us to roll the heavy burdens of worry and the cares of this world upon you, confessing that we are too weak to even lift these burdens to give them to you. All we can do is roll them and have you pick them up. Amen.

Sing about what obedience to Psalm 37:5 means when it comes to resisting the cares of this world, using hymn # 673:

*Cast thy burden on the Lord,
Only lean upon His Word;
Thou wilt soon have cause to bless
His eternal faithfulness.*

*He sustains thee by His hand,
He enables thee to stand;
Those whom Jesus once hath loved
From His grace are never moved.*

*Human counsels come to naught;
That shall stand which God hath wrought;
His compassion, love, and power,
Are the same forevermore.*

*Heav'n and earth may pass away,
God's free grace shall not decay;
He hath promised to fulfill
All the pleasure of His will.*

*Jesus, Guardian of Thy flock,
Be Thyself our constant Rock;
Make us, by Thy powerful hand,
Strong as Zion's mountain stand.*

Wednesday: Read Matthew 13:18-23 and Psalm 37:23-27

Our Shepherding God

One antidote to the “worries of this life” which form such a danger to believers who seek to live fruitful lives of real faith, is to consider how active God is on our behalf to provide all we need. In other words, the reason we can “commit our way” to the Lord, instead of “fretting” over the success of the wicked (Psalm 37:1-5), is because God’s support and commitment to us are so great. Even when wickedness would take possession of our hearts, God snatches us back from the billows of sin and judgment to keep our faith from drowning.

Psalm 37:24 says, “Though he falls he shall not be utterly cast down.” Even though we will at times stumble and fall into sin, God is able to ensure that we will nonetheless not be “utterly cast down” into destruction and the loss of our salvation. Is not David, the author of this Psalm, a great example of God’s restraining him from such soul-destroying sin? Though he was guilty of great iniquity and did not deserve to be forgiven and cleansed (See Psalm 51), God did not allow him to remain wallowing in his guilt and blindness. He brought conviction, repentance, renewed faith and restoration into David’s life. God literally and figuratively took David “by the hand” (Psalm 37:24) and pulled him back from the abyss when the Devil must have thought that David had sinned himself right into the very bosom of Hell!

Meditate and Pray: Are there not countless times when God pulls us back from the destruction by which Satan and sin seek to condemn us? Time and again the Devil’s hopes are dashed as God saves us at the 11th hour, when the midnight of eternal judgment draws nigh! Sing about such rescue, when God guards our steps, using hymn # 486:

*God, be merciful to me,
On Thy grace I rest my plea;
Plenteous in compassion Thou,
Blot out my transgressions now;
Wash me, make me pure within,
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.*

*I am evil, born in sin;
Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Savior art,
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,
Wash me whiter than the snow.*

*Gracious God, my heart renew,
Make my spirit right and true;
Cast me not away from Thee,
Let Thy Spirit dwell in me;
Thy salvation's joy impart,
Steadfast make my willing heart.*

*My transgressions I confess,
Grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against Thy grace
And provoked Thee to Thy face;
I confess Thy judgment just,
Speechless, I Thy mercy trust.*

*Broken, humbled to the dust
By Thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear Thy voice;
From my sins O hide Thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.*

*Sinners then shall learn from me
And return, O God, to Thee;
Savior, all my guilt remove,
And my tongue shall sing Thy love;
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,
And my mouth shall praise accord.*

Thursday: Read Matthew 13:22-30 and John 14:1; 14:27; 16:20-22 & 16:33 Antidote for Anxiety

Leaving aside our study of the “good soil” of Matthew 13:23 for a future time, we close our consideration of the “weeds of worry” which choke the seed of the Gospel in 13:22, by emphasizing other Scriptures which provide just the antidote for our anxieties and fears.

See how graciously Jesus’ words in John 14-16 counteract our self-centered anxiety by persistently pointing us to the peace which “the world cannot give” (John 14:27). Jesus can reach into our hearts, dealing deeply with the troubles and fears down there which we cannot control. With such penetrating ability to control even our heart’s thoughts and emotions, Jesus boldly commands our “hearts not to be troubled” (John 14:1); nor afraid (John 14:27), promising instead that our “sorrows will be turned to joy” (John 16:20, 22). The result is that, through Christ’s loving heart work, we can have His peace even in this world full of tribulation (John 16:33).

Meditate and Pray: Lord, you see my troubled heart. Help me to believe in You, thank you for your peace and provision and promises. I can ask for everything in Your name, because You have overcome the world. Amen.

Friday: Read John 16:33 and Philippians 4:6-7. Just as Jesus gave prominence to His promise of peace for His troubled disciples in the upper room in John 16:33, so the Apostle Paul also promises in Philippians 4:7 that the, “peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” These Scriptures from our Lord and from the Apostle are meant to remind us of the important place which God gives to His promises of peace in our lives.

But what exactly is this peace which we so desperately need as an antidote from our tendency towards fear and anxiety? Here are some definitions:

- 1) Peace with God through Jesus Christ’s death – John 20:19-21 & Romans 5:1-10.

- 2) Peace which removes enmity between believers, as well as the enmity of our sins against God (Ephesians 2:13-18).
- 3) Peace in the mind by which our thoughts are fixed on what Christ has done (Ephesians 6:16 & Philippians 4:7-8).
- 4) Peace which guards our hearts and minds from *being destroyed by anxiety*. (Philippians 4:4-7).

Meditate and Pray: How we should thank God for the richness of His gift of peace to His children through Jesus Christ. Not only are we foundationally given objective peace through Christ's *atonement* on the Cross: a peace *with* God through reconciliation and salvation from God's wrath due to us for our sin – we are also given an *experiential peace* which is to grow increasingly to control all the areas of our lives. Sing about this peace in hymn # 699 in our Red Trinity hymnal, *Like a River Glorious*.

*Like a river glorious, is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious, in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth, fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth, deeper all the way.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*

*Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*

*Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do.
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*