

(Youth Bible School 2007) the Thorny Ground Hearer

by Mose Stoltzfus

The thorny ground hearer is a person who initially receives the Word of God, but due to the cares of this life, deceitfulness of riches, and lusts of other things, becomes unfruitful and loses their spiritual life and vitality.

Duration: 1:19:16

Scripture: Proverbs 23:4, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:7-8, Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Eternal Consequences"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the condition of our hearts, using the parable of the sower from Matthew chapter 13 as a reference. He emphasizes the importance of not allowing our spiritual fire to go out, as there is an enemy to our soul. The speaker also highlights the relevance of this message in our current day and age. He urges listeners to consider the fleeting nature of life on earth and the eternal consequences of their choices. Ultimately, the sermon encourages individuals to prioritize their relationship with God and strive for entrance into the eternal kingdom.

Transcript

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Greetings again. How can it be Friday night already? As time flies fast, doesn't it, you see, from Monday through Friday? I find it that way and I think many of you do too. Well, here we are.

Praise the Lord. And we are very grateful again to be gathered together here tonight in this series of evening meetings here. We have been looking at the condition of our heart or as it is depicted by the parables of our Lord in the type of soil that is spoken to us in Matthew chapter 13.

And Mark and Luke also both have this parable in it. And it is called the parable of a sower. The first night we looked at the soil that is hard and unbroken and the seed that falls upon it and the fowls of the air just come and snatch away the seed, which is the devil taking the thoughts and the convictions out of our heart before they have time to take root.

And then the last two nights we have been looking at stony ground hearers. Tuesday night we looked at the stony ground hearer and last night we wanted to look especially at what we believe is stony ground in our time, in our day as we spoke about the path of rebellion. Now tonight we would like to look at the thorny ground hearer.

The thorny ground hearer. You turn your Bibles again to Matthew chapter 13 verse 7 and verse 22 and then also if we have time we want to close with the good ground hearer. So in Matthew chapter 13 verse 7, And some fell among thorns and the thorns sprung up and choked them.

And then Jesus giving his own interpretation over in verse 22. But I should maybe also read verse 8 there. And other fell upon good ground and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Then over in verse 22, He also that receiveth seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that receiveth seed unto the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

The thorny ground hearer. First of all we want to look at the thorny ground hearer. Now I would believe that the thorny ground hearer is somewhat similar to the stony ground hearer.

It is a little difficult, as I mentioned before, to clearly divide these two. We have the stony ground hearer, which is a shallow earth that is on top of very stony ground. And when the seed falls upon it, yes, it immediately takes root and springs up.

And many of you have seen this at work at home in your walkways and pathways that are laid by brick or stone or concrete. And in the cracks of the stone or concrete or brick, you find little plants starting to spring up out of the crack of the concrete. It is amazing how things can grow with just a little bit of dirt and a little bit of moisture in the crack of a slab of concrete or a walkway.

But it does, and we are always out there, aren't we, pulling them out. And we understand it very well. And when we pull it out, it's just a long, thin root there, but it doesn't have a wide, deep root that goes down and really lays hold of the nutrients and the moisture of the earth in order for it to spring forth.

But then with the burning sun, in persecution and opposition that comes our way, in tribulation, trials and trouble, it soon wilts away. But the thorny ground here is different. Now, it is a little confusing to me, and that's maybe the way parables are.

We have to be careful not to take them too far out to an end, lest we lose the simplicity of the parable that Christ meant. But the thorny ground here, to me, is a step upward. At least we see that, first of all, fruit is still in the focus.

And I don't want to lose sight of that. What we are really looking for in the end of all these parables and all these illustrations that are given in life is that the God of heaven is looking for real, viable fruit in the heart and life of every one of us. And he has the right to expect it, as we'll see a little later on when we look at other scriptures that show us that.

So fruit is still in the focus. But Matthew says here, on the thorny ground here, that this one becometh unfruitful. And so it gives, and I think Mark also uses that phrase, it becometh unfruitful.

The seed is sown, the Word of God is sown. And again, it seems like we have a stalk, a plant, we have life. And it even appears, the possibility at least, that there was once some real good fruit bearing there.

But because of the lack of cultivation or the fact, as it says here, that the seed was sown among the thorns. And just a few thoughts about thorns. Anyway, that they become unfruitful.

Thorns are okay out at the fence row. In fact, they say if you have your thorns where they belong, it sometimes is a protection from animals just coming in and helping themselves. You know, if you have a thick enough hedge or a thorny hedge out around the field, the deer don't come through so quick and other animals of any given size.

And so thorns are not so bad at their rightful place, but they're not any good where the seed is sown, the good seed of the Word of God in the field or where good seed is sown in the field. We don't want thorns and briars there. And neither do we in our heart.

When the Word of God is sown in the human heart, we want a clear heart, a clean heart, and we don't want thorns and thistles and briars around us because what happens as I described again the other night, where we have the problem with the photosynthesis of the sunlight not being able to come down upon a plant. The plant is pale and spindly and short. As you'll see in a cornfield underneath a shade tree.

But here we have a little bit of the same phenomena of a thorny ground. When this seed does spring up, there's nothing wrong with the soil. In this parable, we have nothing at all other than we can assume at least that maybe the roots of the thorns have not been rooted out and the seed bed may not have been quite properly prepared, but at least it looks like at the planting of a seed there was nothing visible that was a problem.

But maybe down underneath the roots were there. And then you know how it is. Weeds grow faster than a good plant usually.

And so if not the proper cultivation is taking place, this of course, the thorns and briars spring up and they gather themselves around and they're just such a good type because you know how thorns are. They scratch you and they prick you and they're the meanest things about to work around without getting hurt. And so a plant just will not prosper in the middle of a briar patch or a middle of a thorny patch.

And so this is the thorny ground here. But the fact that again as we mentioned on the stony ground here and the similarities to it, it appears at least a possibility that there would have been some repentance and a confession of faith. I mentioned Simon the Sorcerer.

I mentioned Ananias and Sapphira. Demas left the Lord having his first, loving this present evil world. Yes, Paul said, Demas left me having loved this world.

And you have men who started out and believed and were baptized but something wasn't right. And because of the mixture that they had with trying to mix the world and witchcraft and philosophy or Christianity and the philosophies of the world and everything's mixed together, the heart was not pure. The soil there was not properly prepared.

It was stony ground soil, I believe, and the stones were never rooted out of the human heart and therefore the plant did not grow on and prosper. But I would like to suggest, at least for the sake of what I see in this parable, the possibility that this could reach a Christian living a time faithful to God and having some fruit in their life. Because I know in the real world, and we look at the Christian life, it is so.

There are young people, there are middle-aged people who have been a Christian for twenty years. Young people maybe not, but middle-aged ones. And young people who are faithful maybe five years, six, seven, eight, nine years.

And in the innocence of youth and when they reach out and accept the Lord, they love the Lord and they are excited about Christianity. But something happens along the way where that diminishes and fades away. And the Hebrew writer talks about, we are not of those that crawl back on the perdition, but are those that believe on the saving of the soul.

And so I at least like to include the possibility that we are also looking at a backslidden condition where someone has prospered for a time and may have some good soil in their life and may have brought some fruit. But the Bible says here very clearly, he becometh unfruitful. Something happens in the Christian life and something happens in your experience that you are drawn away.

And he says here, they are the cares of this life. They are the deceitfulness of riches. And they are the lusts of other things or I think Luke gives it as the pleasures of this world.

And these things happen down the road in a Christian life and experience. And they draw your heart away from God. They draw your heart away from the Bible.

You probably get tired of hearing men say up here, and I think Brother Dean preached about it. I think Brother Denny preached about it or at least alluded to it much. I did not hear all of their messages, but what I did hear, they had an emphasis on the Word and meditating and Bible reading and these kind of things.

And they are very important in our time, in our day. And you say, well, you know, I just hear that everywhere and I hear that all the time. But there is something that happens down the road in our Christian life and experience that tries to get you away from the precious feeding Word of God.

The Word of God is water to the soul. The Word of God is feed to the soul. And I would like to give the story different times concerning William Booth.

When at the peak of his Salvation Army, I should not say maybe at the peak, but there was a time when he had Salvation Army workers across Europe. They were in England and they were in Germany and they were in Denmark, maybe in various countries, France and so on. And the Salvation Army had spread itself.

And one day he just asked all of his generals, I think they were, to come together to a meeting. And he took a kerosene lamp and set it up there on the pulpit and he lit it. And he just left it go there for a time as

everybody sat there in front of him.

I don't know how many men were there. And the thing went lower and lower and lower. And what he had done was the wick was saturated with kerosene, but there was none in the bowl.

And of course, it's not very long. That sucks it up out of the wick, whatever is left in it. And then the flame dies down and goes out.

And he looked at his workers and he said, there is a tendency of a fire to go out. And he sent them home. And that is a reality that you and I must come to grips with.

We have an enemy to the soul. We have an enemy to spiritual life and vitality and being excited about the things of God. There are today, I mean, he mentions here three, although these are extremely great and it matters.

I marvel at how pertinent that is in our day. Cares of this life, deceitfulness of riches and the lovers of pleasure or pleasure. I believe he's on track, but I want to say there seems to be thousands of things that are out there today.

And it seems like the devil hatches them faster than we can even identify them to try to distract the man's mind and a woman's mind from the things of God and from having a quiet, peaceful meditation upon what they read. I fear that entirely too many people, young people especially, are reading the Word of God out of duty and out of commitment maybe that they have made that I'm going to read so many chapters. But they are not, as the Ethiopian eunuch was said, understandest thou what thou readest.

They're not giving the understanding. And you know, it's interesting that that word is used in this very Scripture. It says, he that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word and understandeth it.

I was meditating in the Word of God in Proverbs and it would be very interesting to go in there and just pull out the word understanding. But it is just magnified in that book, the whole matter of understanding. A person who actually thinks things through and weighs out the matter and looks at heaven and looks at hell and looks at sin and looks at righteousness and looks at the good things of life and the bad things of life and makes a clear-cut decision between them all as to what he wants for his soul.

But we truly know that there is a tendency of a fire to go out. And I especially want to emphasize that as you go home from this Bible school. In two weeks from now and a month from now, you will know a lot what you have received here.

Especially those of you who have wept and shed tears upon your face before the God of heaven and confessed and acknowledged your need and your sin. The seriousness of the decision that you have made this week will be known not tonight, not tomorrow afternoon yet probably. But I would expect more in some weeks or months to come.

You will know whether this thing took or whether it didn't, whether it stuck with you or whether it didn't or whether you have changed your way and changed your heart and changed your direction and something has happened that has changed you for life, which is what our whole desire is for you. So we have here nothing wrong with the soil. The possibility of a good start.

I just want to read this scripture in Proverbs 24 when this matter of neglect or we are not of those that draw back on the perdition or the matter of neglect comes up. Proverbs 24 verse 30, I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. There we have that word, understanding.

And lo it was all grown over with thorns and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well and I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that travelth and the want as an armed man.

It's giving you a picture there of what happens in the field of the slothful if the thorns and briars start coming up and there is not immediately cultivation or some back-breaking work of a man going out there with a hoe to take care of those things when they come. They will spring up and gather around that plant and suck the life out of it and not allow it to grow and bring forth fruit. And again I would like to say that something happens and that happening so often is not immediately.

It is not that the devil or the world drops a bomb on us and all at once just blows our faith and our spiritual life to smithereens, but a slow and gradual. We have an interesting word here that is used here in description of this and that's the word choking. I don't know how many of you have ever seen a child or an adult or anyone else choke in a very serious manner, but I tell you that's a pretty scary experience if you have ever seen that and probably most of us have, at least in a child's life, that we have had to take the child, turn it almost upside down and smack it pretty good on the back and set it free from the obstruction.

But it is an obstruction that comes into the airway and the air is blocked in the breath going in and out of the lungs and a person does not last long that way. And many, a person has choked totally to death from having an obstruction in their airway. That word is used here and I looked it up and it means just what it says.

Choking, choking. In 1 John chapter 1, now we want to look at the word. This has come up throughout this series.

I should have maybe preached on this a bit more the first night or the second night when I told you that this word keeps coming up over and over again in all of these examples. 1 John chapter 1, verse 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the word of life. For the life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full. The message is here that that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled was called the word of life.

But John is not speaking about holding the New Testament Bible in his hand. He is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And it is called the word of life.

And so John chapter 1 says, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. And so we can use this word interchangeably, the word and Christ himself. So we don't want to

isolate it only to Bible reading, but true communion with the God of heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is something we cannot get away from it. We cannot get away from it. All right, now there are three causes of this choking experience to our spiritual life.

Here we have the word of God sown in our heart. And we believe it is room for plenty of roots here. But then we have these thorns coming up after we have made that initial commitment, after we have had a fairly clear experience with God.

And we have an effect that this is a threat. This is an effect to everyone in this room. We are not looking at young people that are just making a commitment that have this problem.

We are not looking at those of you who are just making a beginning. And we hope that you will steady yourself. And if you stumble and fall, get right back up and go forward again.

We do expect that of you. We do want that for you. But we are looking at something more serious than that.

We are looking at something that I have to face, though I am a Christian over 45 years. And that is that there are issues in life and there are happenings in life that can come up, that can slowly and surely begin to choke the word of God out of your life. Or the relationship with God out of your life.

We heard this morning about losing our first love in Revelation chapter 2 on the church of Ephesus. When it can have everything in motion and be praised, I do not know on how many issues, but I think it is about eight of them or so that they were commended for. And yet they were in threat, under threat of losing their candlestick out of its place because they had lost their first love.

And I tell you, brethren, this is real in the world we have today. We as Christian workers face those things at times. We get tired.

Tired of fighting. Tired of the battle at times. And at that times, you know, you can have thoughts starting through your mind or thoughts that you have to grapple with.

Well, should I just lay down now? I have labored about long enough and just retire like many do, you know, and give up the ministry or the fight of being on the battle front and many of those things that come our way, especially as leaders. But I remember the commitment that I, by God's grace, made when I began this journey, especially when I had a revival in my life some 26 years ago and faced this thing in a very real way, my Christian life and experience and ministry and so on, that our desire was to continue on as long as we have breath and ability to do it. And that's, by God's grace, we want to not get weary of well-doing.

Thank God He continues to give us strength. But now let's look at these three threats to all of us as Christians. Young and old, tall or short, foreign or local, it doesn't matter where you're from, where you live, this is reality, the cares of this life, the cares of this life.

Let us read over in Luke chapter 14 verse 16. It's not the right scripture. Chapter 13 verse 6. He spake also this parable.

A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. And he said unto the dresser of the vineyard, I know I had this scripture for a reason here. I'm not

sure whether this is what I wanted or not.

I think I'll go on. The cares of this life. What we're looking here is simply the concerns and cares that come upon the human life.

And I believe some of them can be very ordinary. They can just be ordinary life. The worry and the fret and the concern or the lack of faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we begin to fret and worry and be cumbered about with too many cares concerning our future, concerning our health, concerning next year, concerning who I'm going to marry, concerning everything about something out ahead of us. And instead of a quiet and peaceable life to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, we are cumbered about with the cares of this life. Health many times comes in as a major issue.

I remember a young lady, and I've given this story before. I don't believe most of you have heard it, but I knew a young lady in the church I was with some years ago that her mother had died of cancer. And she had a terrible death.

And she was a neighbor to us, and I remember she just pined away down to skin and bones, and finally she wouldn't eat anymore, and she died a few days later. But one of her daughters was married and had a family, and she got into the fear of cancer. She feared cancer so much during her middle years somewhere, maybe when she was close to the age of her mother, when her mother died or something like that, this thing came upon her and began to grip her, and she worried about cancer.

I was afraid she was going to develop it. And those things happen. It is an amazing thing, but you know, she's living today.

She never did get cancer, but she just succumbed to the fear of cancer. And in that age that she was in, that it just about debilitated her from functioning as a normal Christian and a normal mother in the home and everything, because she was so afraid that she would get cancer. I knew another woman who had a health food store down in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, that I did some work for years ago, and she was trying to feed everybody everything that would prevent cancer.

And I believe she was focusing on the care of this life and what cancer and its effect it has on so many people. And I know that's a burden. There's a lot of people dying of cancer.

And we grope at answers for some of that. But she was a health food fanatic, and I mean she had everything natural and everything in vitamins and minerals and teas in her little store, and she still had little children. I don't know how old she was probably, still in her 30s or maybe barely 40 years of age, and in that condition actually developed cancer and died of it shortly thereafter.

And I often wondered whether or not because of the fact that she did not look to the Lord and just live a normal life, but she focused on the fear of cancer, and I often wondered whether that might have helped her develop it. The cares of this life. It means to be overly cumbered and overly concerned about the earthly things of life.

And you know they say well over 90% of the things that people fear and worry about never come to pass. It does not pay to worry. And to cumber yourself down with the cares of this life to that degree.

But it means what on the contrary. We are called upon to put our faith and trust in God. And to rest and rely upon Him.

Enter into the rest that is provided for you according to the book of Hebrews there. That we are called to enter into His rest. And I believe part of that rest is from the worry about hell and about our sins.

But it also we enter into a restful and content Christian life. So many people are concerned about maintaining a spotless life. A spotless house or a garden or a lawn.

I mean it is incredible how it was where I grew up. And we were so conscious of our neighbors that in the fall of the year. If they would harvest their crop a little before us and get ahead of us.

We would get all nervous and look out the window and see them out of the field before we got to the field. And my grandmother she used to get on my case. You know if I would rest a little bit over lunch time that the neighbor is already out.

You better get out there. And we lived in fear of the neighbor about in that way. And it motivated us and drove us.

I mean you cannot imagine that little country culture. How we watched each other's fields and watched each other's doings from farm to farm. And tried to rule our life by it.

Because we were so afraid that they would get their crop in and they would be all done. And we would still be out there slaving away. And everybody wanted to be first to finish.

And to have the honor that when we could meet perhaps on Sunday. We could tell we're already done. It's unbelievable.

The things that brought into our life. But people do this with dress. They're so afraid that somebody will look at you and say, I don't like that color.

Or I don't like the way that looks on you. That makes you look fat or skinny or whatever. And you know they begin to do these things that we respond out of a direct influence of other things and other people.

And it just could drive you crazy. I know of a sister, she may be here tonight, who gave us a story before her conversion of how she cleaned her whole house every, what was it, every week? I believe. From attic to basement.

Including the lawn outside and the barnyard and everything around. The flower garden and flower beds. Everything had to be clean.

I was a workaholic, she says. Driven to have everything spotless. Everything perfectly in order.

What for? I don't know if I asked her exactly what for or if she ever analyzed it. But it probably has to do many times with a pride of it all. Or maybe it's just perfectionism.

I don't know. But that if somebody drives into the yard, that they see everything in order and they scream back to you how beautiful everything looks. And we want that honor and we want that perfection.

Cares of this life. But many things, too, can come. The cares of life that we are over-cumbered in business.

And busyness. I think some of the other teachers mentioned the busyness of Lancaster County. And you should hear some of the totals and tallies of the amount of hours that men work.

They tell me it is common that men, in order to get a business going, you know, expect to work from 5 o'clock in the morning until 8, 9 at night. Even in the cities, you know, worldly people, that's what they expect. And it's one of those things, you know, when you get started, you work the whole day either with customers in a business or in a contracting business.

And then evenings you do your book work. And it's a very dangerous thing that when even we start in a small way in a business, because we're not big enough to have somebody do the secretarial work, we do everything and we are cumbered about with the cares of this life to where it drowns us spiritually and takes away our service for God. There's a tendency for that also very much.

Philippians chapter 4, verse 6 says, Be careful for nothing, but in everything we are to give thanks unto God. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God. Be careful for nothing.

Don't have that extra care and extra worry. And I believe that is what is meant in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says not to take thought concerning what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear. And he turns us to the birds and to the lilies of the field, how they toil not and they spin not, yet God cares for my all.

I don't believe it is wrong. He's saying that it is wrong to can fruit and put it up in your basement somewhere so you have food for the winter or to fill your freezer with your vegetables out of your garden so you have to eat in the winter. But it's that over-anxious worry and care that have to do with the cares of life that I believe are directly condemned there.

The second one we have is riches. And here he actually says the deceitfulness of riches. Do you know that riches are deceitful? Money is not, but the love of money is the root of all evil.

And the pursuit of them likewise, the get-rich-quick ideas and to plan and plot out exactly how you're going to do that by a certain age you will have this kind of money instead of just living and trying to fill a need with a service or with a work, supplying a product or supplying something that is needed in the community where you live. The deceitfulness of riches. And I'll tell you, it's an amazing thing what money does to people.

One of my griefs concerning that is when riches increase or somebody does prosper a bit and God blesses them, they immediately adjust their lifestyle accordingly. And it begins to climb a ladder, climb a ladder, until they cannot communicate with the simple things of life anymore. But now they're into another class and now they have to dine with the rich and the mighty so to speak, or a higher class of people.

And it is so empty. It is so empty when you just, we call it the rat race, you know. Everything just goes concerning and we have, as the Bible says, no time for God or the phrase that I wanted there.

There's another phrase that I had in mind earlier today concerning, but here, this is a good one. It chokes out the word. The deceitfulness of riches, the lust of other things, they choke out the word and a person becomes unfruitful.

But the saddest part with some of the busy schedules that we have here in Lancaster County and many other places, it's not only here, but it is very pronounced here. People have been hard workers and go-getters for many years in this county and some of you will notice it when you drive around here. It's kind of the in thing to live like that.

It kind of grows on you or it is a temptation to and a person has to hold themselves back concerning its effect. But what so often happens is a man doesn't have time anymore to do the things of God and he becometh unfruitful. The spiritual activities of life are choked out and the fruit bearing is gone.

Overspending, likewise. High debt, pressure on our lives like that. Somehow just thinking, I need a break and traveling and as the Bible says here, poverty comes upon us like a man that travelth.

Traveling is costly these days and we run here and run there and then come home kaput and hardly want to start our next day's work. It's like they say, we're more tired when we come home from vacation than we were when we left. Those are some of the snares of life that come upon us sometimes by how we live and just what is normal life that is expected.

Everybody else does it and we do it likewise and we never think it through on the effect that it has on our life. No time for God and that's something. We have time for so many things to take a couple days off for relaxation and I believe the body and mind need that, especially from a rigorous work schedule or mental pressures at our work.

But when will we take a couple of days off just to do the things of God? That is so important likewise. Lest the soul begins to wither and die and gets choked out and it just gives a picture of a thorn wrapping itself around us and choking the life out of it and we become unfruitful like it says. In my financial seminar that I gave some years ago in Colorado, I mentioned this fact and I mentioned at different places there are more divorces over issues of money, more broken homes and divorces over issues of money than any other thing, any other cause.

Let me read to you a very common scripture in 1 Timothy 6, 9 and 10. But they that will be rich, remember it is the desire for riches, although I will admit that to handle money is a greater temptation than if you don't have it to handle. There's a lot of people who cannot handle money.

As soon as a certain amount flows through their fingers, they forget about their debts and use it for their own use or their own pleasures we might say. They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare The desire for riches has with it a unique temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have erred them from the faith.

They have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Isn't that interesting that the word pierced is used and we're looking at thorns choking us out, aren't we? And we have that word there. It is my conviction that our lifestyle should be simple and should not change if God blesses us, but rather that it should redound to the spreading of the Gospel across the world, the printing of Bibles, the helping of orphans and various things like that or the legitimate use, if riches increase, the Bible says, set not thy heart upon it.

And I know Brother Dean gave you many things on that likewise, so I'm not going to belabor the point. The third one we have here is pleasures. And this one I believe is the greatest.

Well, I don't know if I should say that. But I find that both rich and poor, those who can afford it and those who can't, are both encumbered with so many desires for senseless pleasures. I thought we were busy before we had the Internet or before we had e-mail.

Isn't it incredible the amount of hours that is sapped out of the Christian church in front of a computer today, surfing around and just looking at things and the prices of them and buying and selling on eBay and chasing down all that stuff. And before we know it, we are simply spending countless hours in front of the computer and we thought we were marginal on our prayer life and our Bible reading before we ever had them. What is it like now? I'm going to read something out of Horatius Bonar when he wrote an article here on Christ and the world in 1867.

And I want to give you the perspective that he has on a lot of these things. They know that there will be no worldliness in the world to come. He's talking about worldly people who seem to be aware that it's only in this life that they will be able to give vent to their worldliness.

They know that there will be no worldliness in the world to come. That there will be no money making, no pleasure finding, no feasting, no reveling, no balls, nor races, nor theaters in heaven or in hell. Hence their eagerness to taste life's glad moments, to take their fill of mirth, and to make the best of this life while it lasts.

And hence the origin of their motto, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Such are out and out lovers of pleasures, worshipers of the God of this world. They admirers of vanity, the indulgers of the flesh.

But pleasure won't do always, and this world will not last forever, and vanity will soon pass away, and the flesh will cease to satisfy. And when all these things come to an end, what will be the condition of those whose gods they were? Cheated, befooled, despairing, their blossoms shall go up as dust, and they themselves shall lie down in sorrow. Their idols are broken in pieces, and they find at last that they have trusted in a lie.

And that now, when most they needed support, they have none to support them. They are left without a God, without light, without help, without even so much as the hope of a hope, or the faintest glimmer of a dawn in that long night which after their merry day of pleasure has fallen so thickly over them. Yes, life is brief, and time is swift.

Generations come and go. Graves open and close each day. Young and old vanish out of sight.

Riches depart, and honors fade. Autumn follows summer, and winter soon wipes out every trace of leaf and blossom. Nothing abides or remains unchanging but the blue sky and the everlasting hills.

Old man, dying man, dweller of a dying earth, living amid sickbeds and deathbeds and funerals and graves, surrounded by fallen leaves and faded blossoms, the sport of broken homes and fruitless joys and empty dreams and fervent longings and never-healing, never-ending heartaches. Old man, dying man, will you still follow vanity and lies? Still chase pleasure and gaiety? Still sow the wind and reap the whirlwind? After all, after all that has been told you of the earthly earth's weariness and pleasure's emptiness, after all that you yourself have experienced of the vanity of all things here below, after having been so often disappointed, mocked and made miserable by that world which you worship, will you still pursue the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye and the pride of life? O follower of the world, consider your ways and ponder your prospects. Look behind you and see the utter emptiness of the past.

Look before you and make sure of something better than more substantial. Look on the right hand and on the left and see the weary crowds seeking rest and finding none. Look beneath you to that eternal fire which is being prepared for all that forget God.

Look above you and see the bright heaven and all its unutterable grandness which you are so madly despising. Think you of your brief time on earth lent to you in God's special love to accomplish your preparation for the eternal kingdom. And when you consider these things, rouse yourself from your dream of worldly pleasure and rest not until you have made good the entrance at the straight gate which leads on to life.

You know, some people seem to just have enough of Christianity to be miserable. And I feel for them. There's no power.

They have never won a soul to Christ. And I understand that if you're just a young Christian who just got born again, but it ought to be a hot desire inside of you. But if you've never won a soul to Christ and you've never witnessed anybody and you don't have any joy bubbling out of you, you don't ever have any living water flowing out of you to others and therefore you don't know what that living water and that fountain is that surges through you.

And I think many times they have about enough of Christianity to make them miserable. And they say, well, I don't know about this Christianity. It doesn't seem very exciting to me.

All this trials and troubles. You can't have the power over sin anyhow. And they begin to grumble and complain about the whole thing.

And they're about ready to throw in the towel and walk away from it. They have never tasted of the good Word of God and of the powers of the world to come. And many other things.

You know, that's when formalism sets in. And a person, you know, doesn't want to abandon the whole thing. And so they still go to church and they become a member.

And they want to take communion and they want to do a few of these rituals throughout their life so as to somehow satisfy the fact that they're still into it somewhat. But as the Bible says, they deny the power thereof. They have the form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.

And that is not a way to experience the Christian life. He further writes here, These are the ambiguous disciples of our age who belong to Christ only in name. These are the stony ground or thorny ground hearers, men who have a place at our communion tables, who join in religious committees, who make speeches on religious platforms, yet are after all wells without water, trees without root, stars with neither heat nor light.

Oh, worldly formalists, you would make sure your hope and obtain a discipleship that will stand all tests beginning this day at the beginning. Count all past but lost. Fling away your vain hopes and self-righteous confidences and give up your fond idea of securing both earth and heaven.

Go straight to Calvary. There be you crucified to the world and the world to you. By the cross of Christ, go straight to the grave of Christ.

There bring all your sins, your worldliness, your half-heartedness, and all pertaining to your old self that being made partaker of Christ's death and burial. And there, I believe, is where you find victory. Cares of this life.

At home, I get something from I'm not sure how it's pronounced, Memorial Ministries. I think they give me an email of the various things that are happening on the religious scene in the world. And maybe some of you heard about it, but the government, I think probably Internal Revenue Service, is investigating six ministries presently concerning inappropriate handling of huge amounts of money for personal gain and personal pleasure tax-free.

Randy and Paul White of Without Walls International Church, Benny Hinn of World Healing Center Church, Incorporated, David and Joyce Meyer of Joyce Meyer Ministries in Missouri, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, and Bishop Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, and Creflo and Taffi Dollar of World Changers Church International. And the problem is \$20 million headquarters, and the one that got my attention was that one of them has moved into a \$10 million, excuse me, has a \$10 million corporate jet, a \$2 million home, a family's fleet of fancy cars, and claiming that they were blessings straight from God. But the letters mention Rolls Royce cars, overseas bank accounts, private jets and planes, donated jewelry, and in the case of one of them, a \$23,000 commode with a marble top.

Brethren, something is drastically wrong. Something is drastically wrong. Let us go quickly to the good ground hearer.

The good ground hearer. Turning back to our text in Matthew chapter 13, where it says, He that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit and bringeth forth some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. Now I remember being raised on a farm, preparing the seed bed in the spring of the year for the crops that we were to put out.

And that was an enjoyable thing. You know, to see the ground being plowed and all the trash of the former year turned under, and then to begin to disk it and to hire it and work it over until we had a fine seed bed. And that was a pleasurable thing to look upon.

And then to go out there and plant those seeds and transplant plants into that soil and have them spring up and come forth ahead of the weeds. And then to go out and cultivate that and keep the weeds down and take it all the way through to a bountiful harvest. That was a pleasure.

That was a blessing. And it's something that I would like to say very clearly, it is possible. It is possible.

Likewise for the Christian. You don't have to be wrapped up in thorns tonight and thistles and briars in your life. You do not have to be planted in a stony ground and have so many stones right underneath the soil that you're half starved all of the time because you have no root in them.

You don't have to have a hard heart that the seed just falls on and bounces off tonight and you'll go out this door five days after you came in the same person you were. And there have no changes taken place. The Bible says that the seed falls on good ground and the individual receiveth it.

And I would like to look at this that here is where the acceptance comes in. We reach out by faith in Jesus Christ. We believe the record that God gave His Son.

And we embrace the truth. We embrace the Gospel. We are willing to turn from our sin and heave out every little stone that may be left and become good soil for the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is possible according to the parables of the Word of God tonight. And you know it doesn't say that you have to have some grand and glorious second or third experience in order to get it. It simply says the seed fell upon good ground and it brought forth fruit.

You took it, received it, had understanding with it and it brought thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold back for God. And you can have that experience. It is not as complicated as you might think.

If you are willing to face your sin and face your mistakes and face your hidden rebellion and different things in your life that are not of God and have to be rooted out, you are willing to confess and have a clear and open conscience before God and according to the written Word of God and the words of Jesus, you can maintain and keep that through life and you can start bearing fruit and bringing forth fruit unto God. And that is a tremendous blessing. When we look at the preparation of the soil, we notice something different here.

Even though the detail is not given, but I believe the soil was not prepared in the first one. It was not properly prepared in the second one. And there is even a possibility, as I mentioned, that the roots of these thorns and briars were in the third one and not properly rooted out before the plant was planted.

But in either way, they sprung up and choked out the word. But in the fourth one, the good and solid earth, the good ground, there the seed falls in there and moisture comes down upon the soil. The soil is fine and has been worked over and made soft and it receives the seed.

There it germinates very quickly. I am amazed as my neighbor plants his cornfield right next door to our house and I see it often in the spring of the year after a little shower comes, soon after he plants it, that we have something springing up in five days. And when it is properly prepared, isn't that an amazing thing? That God has made it that way.

But I believe we can allude that to the Old Testament where it says, Break up the fallow ground. Break up that hard, run-down soil. And disk it and harrow it and work the thing over.

Or if we look at it literally, take the rake over it back and forth until it is fine and you have raked out all the stones. A broken and a contrite heart will not be despised, just like a broken up soil into a real fine dirt that receives the seed gladly, so a heart likewise that is broken and contrite will always see that too. See Christ on the cross.

Surrender at the feet of Christ. I believe that we don't want to get... I don't want to give you the picture here that the soil must be prepared before you get converted. But I want to take it as one thing there.

This preparation of the soil is that deep-rooted repentance and conversion experience. And then you're set to grow from there on out. Hebrews 9.14 How much more shall the blood... It's referring to if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctified to the purifying of the flesh in verse 13.

Then 14 says, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offer Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? I believe that the Gospel needs to be embraced and received as your very own. There needs to be an embracing of the

Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You didn't just accept the religion of the church.

Something is extremely personal in this matter. And you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as your very own. Let it penetrate deeply into your soil.

After the soil has been properly prepared, let the roots go down deep in your life. And I believe every teacher that has been teaching this week has been trying to impress that in one way or another. That something that would stick, something that would stay, something that would go deep into your life, something that will last, and something that will bring forth fruit unto God.

Now when we look at fruit, we often have two mindsets. We want to look a little bit at fruit here in closing. One of it is, of course, the fruit of the Spirit.

That is the first and foremost fruit, I believe, that a Christian has. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, faith. Against such there is no law.

But a person should have, when they enter the change by the power of the Gospel, and old things pass away and all things become new, there ought to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit has not come into your life, you are not converted. Because it is the Holy Spirit of God that converts us.

That creates the change. That gives you the power to put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new. So you need to have the Spirit of God, and that is what converts you.

The power of the Spirit of God. And then the next one is like the African over in Bun Bun preached the Gospel. The fruit of a Christian is more Christians.

That is the second one I like. First of all, I believe we have the fruit of the Spirit in the love, joy, peace, where we have the actual effect of God in our life in a personal manner. But very quickly then, it ought to affect other people around us.

And I think that should be true for men and women, boys and girls. There ought to be a flow. There ought to be a halo of glory around you.

There ought to be something emanating out from you that has a direct effect on someone else. And you can always write letters. And you can be an encouragement.

You can talk to other sisters and other young girls and encourage them to give their heart to the Lord. One sister here last night got to go along back into the council room to help pray with another one. And she was so moved.

She was so blessed by letting some living water flow out of her that she was moved to tears today just telling me about the joy of it. And there is an exceptional and blessed joy in giving out the Gospel. And you need to experience it in order to experience the power of God in your life.

If you just take in, like Brother Denny said, as the Dead Sea and don't give back out, you'll become stagnant. And as he said, nothing lives in the Dead Sea. It's dead water and good for nothing practically except maybe some minerals that you can get out of it.

It's so thick. Bring forth the fruit of the Spirit of God in your life in both of those ways. The next point I have here is walk in obedience to the Word of God.

You know the little song that the children sing about the wise man building his house upon the rock and the foolish man building his house upon the sand? That is written to those that would obey the truth. Those that do the Word of God and keep it. That's who it's written to.

If you do, and if you obey the Scriptures, if you believe them and embrace them and obey them, it's like building your house on the rock. And I think it's been mentioned before, but I'd like to emphasize again a believer's baptism. If you're serious about the things of God, you need a believer's baptism.

To enter into the waters and seal your faith and your profession of faith in holy baptism is a commandment of God according to His Word. And not something you can take and leave and think about it for the next three years as to whether you want to do it or not. Seek an opportunity.

Maybe you're not in a place where there's a church, but seek to go somewhere where there is one and ask to be baptized upon your confession of faith. And then get involved in the church life, in the spiritual life. Somehow there must be a giving out, a flow in your life.

And then serve the Body of Christ. Serve the Lord Jesus Christ for the rest of your days. Good ground here.

And that, like, even though I spoke much in the negative this week, I would like to say that is what I'm persuaded of you. I believe that many of you are sincere and serious. But I also know that in a crowd this size, without a doubt, there are others who are still back in one of the other grounds.

A stony ground here, a wayside here, or someone that is a thorny ground here and has not yet yielded their life to the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to give you that invitation tonight at the close of this service to give you that opportunity. Shall we stand together for a word of prayer before we sing? And we want to give you the opportunity tonight.

Somebody has heard the Word of God being preached today. You're still wrestling and you held on to your seat last night even though you know you're living in rebellion. You can't bring yourself to confess to your father and mother.

You're still stiffening your neck or you just have simply never been born again. You're here, maybe as a visitor. I see there's a lot of people in the back.

You just entered this place today and you've heard the Gospel preached tonight and have it laid out and you're trying to figure out what to do to get right with God. You come up here, kneel at the altar and someone will pray with you and try to help you. Shall we pray? Father in Heaven, dear Lord Jesus, we come to You tonight and thank You for the work and the plowing that You have already done so much upon this student body.

Young people have responded to the call of the Gospel and the needs of their very life and opened their heart and confessed and are willing to forsake their sins and their ways and they're willing to take the ways of God. I thank You for every one of them, but Lord Jesus, I pray for those who have held out and have not responded and have not been able to bow their hearts and submit themselves to the God of Heaven and the conviction that they've been fighting all week long. Lord Jesus, tonight we want to give them one more opportunity.

And I do pray, Father, the sin conviction upon every heart that is stony, that's a wayside heart, that is choked out with the cares of this life, the riches, the seedfulness of riches, the lusts of other things. Lord, the pleasures of life, they're always going after their selfish pleasures. No time for You.

No time to help a soul find You. O God, I pray, speak to all of our hearts tonight that we would be soft and tender toward You and the lesson that You have given us here in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and let them sink deep in our heart. Lord, I pray that the soil may be fine and tender to hear the Word of God.

To hear with the ears of our heart and to open it up and let God have His way in our life. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Shall we sing a song? 371.

What's the number? 371. 371. Shall we sing? Have Thine own way, Lord.

Have Thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay. I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way. Search me and try me.

Master today, Whiter than Wash me just now As in Thy prayers. Humbly I bow. Before God or be born again for the first time.

Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way. Wounded and weary.

Help me, I pray. Power of power. Surely is Thine.

Touch me and heal me. Savior divine. Have Thine own way, Lord.

Have Thine own way. Hold o'er my being. Absolute sway.

Fill with Thy Spirit. Till all shall see. Christ only.

Always living in me.

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