

Sunday Sermon July 30, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 13: 3-9; 18-23

Sermon Theme: The Word Works. 1. It is cast to all 2. It produces a crop in some.

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Of all the marketing tools and advertising campaigns out there, the best way to sell a product is still by word of mouth. Companies know that the most important way to sell their brand is for you to tell your friends how good it is. They know that to get that praise they need to offer a product or a service that actually works. If something works as advertised, if the service runs as it should, people will be happy with it and will tell others about it.

If there is one thing we should know about God’s Word, it’s that it works. Notice our lesson from Isaiah for today: **So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

When God’s Word is spoken, when it is preached, it is never done in vain, it will always accomplish what God sent it out to do and it will always achieve the goal that God has in mind. Isaiah simply tells us God’s word works.

As we look at the Parable of the Sower and the Seed this morning we will see that God’s Word works. It is cast to all people and it produces a harvest in some.

I have actually only seen a person cast seed once in my life. A landscaper was putting in a new lawn for a neighbor. First, they tilled up the ground. Then they cast a mixture of nitrogen fertilizer and finally, instead of using a push cart, the landscaper took out a bag of seed and began to walk back and forth casting the seed on the ground. I asked him why he didn’t use a push cart. He told me that this method had been used for years to plant many fields. Those fields grew well. Then he laughed and said he had also never seen a lawn that nicely laid out evenly with little rows of seed.

This idea of a sower casting seed is lost to us in an age of machinery and assistance from technology. Our fields are planted in nice even rows or if we plant a garden or a flower bed, we plan it out so that this flower grows here or that plant goes there.

There was much that was different with planting and seeds during Bible times. When we plant, we expect those seeds to grow in a nice even pattern because that is the way that the seed was engineered to grow and that is how we planned our garden. Today, only the best seed is used for planting. In Bible times, you couldn’t be sure that that seed you were planting was going to grow. This was not seed that was engineered by an agricultural company for a certain yield, this was not seed that went along a conveyor belt where only the best seed passed through and the other seed was thrown away. In Bible times, a portion of the harvest was set aside for seed and that became the seed for the next year. All the seed was used, whether it was good or bad.

The methods of planting were also quite different. The purpose of the caster was not to make sure that one seed made it into a hole approximately 8 inches from the next seed. The purpose of the caster was to make

sure that the most seed got over the most area in the shortest amount of time. Even if a third of the seed was bad, there would be plenty of good seed in that area and the plants would.

The caster's job was to cast the seed and as we notice in the parable that is exactly what he did. By today's standard this caster was either lazy or he was extremely wasteful. He cast that seed far and wide and didn't seem to care where it fell. Some fell on the hard packed path, some on thorny ground, some on weedy ground and only what seems like a small portion falls on the good ground.

But there is a reason that Jesus told his parable this way. There is a reason that Isaiah 55 10,11 and this Parable of the Sower and the Seed are read on the same day. The point of the parable is not that the sower was lazy or wasteful, rather just as Isaiah says, God's Word goes out to all, it is cast to all people, not just a few people here or there.

Have you ever really listened for the type of people Jesus' preached to? Think about it for a minute..... If you can't come up with specifics you can surely remember the label that the people had: Pharisees, sinners, tax collectors, Gentiles.

Jesus cast his Word to all sorts people: the wealthy religious rulers, the middle class working Jew, and people who had been afflicted with diseases like the lepers, people who were caught in sexual sins like the prostitutes, people who were known liars and cheaters like tax collectors, and people who were not the correct nationality or class of people like Gentiles. Often, it was the sinners, tax collectors and Gentiles who listened the most and repented when they heard his Word.

Jesus casts his Word to all people and he wants that Word to continue to be cast today. But, who are the sowers today? We are. Have you ever thought of yourself as the tool of God? Have you ever thought that your words, were the words of God?

Even though, God expects us to do this work, we are reluctant to use the Word of God, or we simply refuse to cast that Word of God to others. Maybe we're scared, maybe we don't want to associate with that kind of person, or we don't think they will listen to us. This is sin talking in us. Jesus lesson here is simple. Cast my word to all people.

When Jesus says cast, he means only cast. Notice what the sower in the parable does not do. There is no mention of tending the fields. There is no mention of weeding or watering. Not mention of doing the things you would expect the worker in the field to do. We don't need to worry about what happens next because God promises that his Word works and His Word will accomplish the goal and purpose that it was sent out for.

As we look at the other half of the parable we see how the Word works. In this parable the seed, God's Word, worked in 4 out of 4 soils.

Maybe, if you have heard this parable before, you may be wondering how we can say that God's Word worked in 4 out of 4 soils. When we think of the Word working and not returning empty, we think of big full churches and no budget issues because that is what the world sees as success. However, God's Word doesn't always work that way. But, it does do what it is supposed to do. God's Law convicts us of our sins and his Gospel leads us to Jesus.

The first soil was rock. The people did not listen. We have many examples in the Bible of people who had hard hearts and refused to listen to Jesus. The Word was cast to people like Pharaoh, the OT Israelites, the idol believing nations, the Pharisees, the Romans and the result of that casting is that many refused to listen to the message of the Messiah, which was the saving message of the Savior. To these, God's Word does not give the sweet comfort of forgiveness and eternal life, to these the Word of God convicts them of their sin and tells them that the wages of these sins is death.

At first, we might think the Word of God didn't work in these people, however, the Word of God is certainly at work as it is cast over and over. But, in the end, the Law was at work and not the Gospel. That Law will work, bringing judgment to the unrepentant soul.

Other seeds fell on three other soil where the Word of God produced some result. Some seed fell on the shallow rocky ground and some fell on the weedy, thorny ground. There was growth, but only for a short time.

There are times in our lives where the Word of God might be something we want to hear. Maybe we are experiencing a trouble or a problem and we need something to hold onto. Maybe we are just having one of those weeks where we want to hear something that will make us feel better. This happens in other people's lives too. As sowers of God's Word, we might not always know what is going on in someone else's life, but we better be ready to sow when the opportunity is there.

Just as the importance of God's Word goes up in our life, the importance can also fade. And that is what we see in these two soils don't we? What makes a person fall away? What kind of earthly things overshadow the words and promises of God?

We might think that these two soils show us that God's Word does not work. Although it produces for a short time, God's Word isn't as powerful as it should be.

The fault does not lie with God, but with sinful people. It is sinful people, like us, who put the promises of God in the backseat of their life. Haven't we placed God second and what we want first? Don't we overlook, or take God's Word for granted because we have something in our life that we think is more important? Maybe it is some wealth, like a job, or vacation time, maybe a disease or illness overshadows everything else so that we forget all the promises that God has made to us. Have you ever used one of these excuses to miss a devotion, church or Bible Study, "'We are just too busy.' 'I have a lot going on.' 'Church is not at the right time for me.' 'God will forgive me if I miss another service, I'm just too tired.'"

All of these are excuses. God never forces himself into our lives or forces us to believe. He gives us the great gift of faith through the Holy Spirit. The truth of the weedy and rocky soil is the simple truth of our sinful lives. If we put God in second place, by making our own wants and needs more important than him, his house, and his Word, we will soon be scorched by the sun of sin or choked out by the weeds and thorns of sinful worry and we will fall away from him as well.

Yet, Isaiah says the Word of God works. When the Gospel is preached it works. Isaiah says, "**As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.**" The Word of God works, when the Gospel is preached it turns sinfulness to repentance, godlessness to godliness, unbelief to belief.

This Word of God is sown over the earth. God waters it and tends it and as he does it buds and flourishes. Jesus says that it produces a harvest 100, 60 or 30 times what was sown. By focusing on those who seem to turn from the Word, we often miss the blessing that God works in the lives when the Word does work.

There are some, even many, in whom the Holy Spirit works faith when the Gospel is preached. They do not have hard hearts. By the grace of God, his Word turns them from dull and lifeless people, to people who know that Jesus has died on the cross for us. Our lives take on a whole new meaning, filled with the Spirit of God who are budding and flourishing and producing a crop of thankfulness to him.

And this harvest of souls will produce more sowers who will cast that seed to many others and God's Word will continue to work to produce a harvest of thankfulness.

The greatest marketing tool is word of mouth. We have something that has worked for thousands of years and continues to work today. We have the Gospel message of our Savior, Jesus. God tells us to cast the seed of his Word to all people. This is one of the harvests of thankfulness we have to God. By God's grace, the Word that we share with others works, will produce the effect that God intended and will accomplish his goal. It is cast to all and it will work a harvest that leads to eternal life.