



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

44 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6NN

Charity No. 1060655

Tel: 020 7328 0869 (Manse)

Email: newlifeplondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.newlifebpc.org.uk

“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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The Wayside And The Rocks

*By Dr Dan Doriani, Part 2 of 4 of “The Parable of the Sower”
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – June 2009*

Matthew 13 begins with three words: “that same day.” They summon us to connect the parable of the sower to the controversy described in the previous passage. Troubles began when Jesus healed a man rendered blind and mute by demonic power. Jesus healed the man, so that many people wondered: “Can this be the Son of David?” (Matt 12:22)

The Pharisees had another explanation. His power is undeniable, but He must be a sinner, for He works on the Sabbath and befriends sinners, which they considered sins. Since He is evil and powerful, the source of His power must be evil, even satanic (Matt 12:24).

Imagine what the apostles thought as the controversy unfolded. Jesus performed signs that advertised the arrival of the kingdom of God, yet many opposed Him. The disciples had to be perplexed. If Jesus is Savior, why did so few follow Him? Why did Israel’s leaders reject their long-awaited deliverer?

With these questions in the air, Jesus changed location and tactics. Jesus had taught in synagogues, now He teaches in the open air. He sits in a boat; large crowds stand by the lake as He teaches them “many things.” Jesus had spoken and acted openly, now He speaks cryptically, in parables beginning with a parable about a farmer planting (Matt 13:3).

The sower and the soils (Matt 13:3-9)

The farmer’s methods seem odd to us, but they were typical of the day. Farmers often scattered seed first, then tilled the soil. The sower tossed his seed onto four types of earth; onto a path, onto rocky soil (that is, onto a thin layer of soil with rock below), onto land covered with thorns, and onto good soil. We will consider the first two.

First, the sower cast seed onto a foot-path that travellers had worn into his field. By casting seed there, the farmer reclaimed his field, but the birds quickly devoured the seeds that lay exposed on hard-packed dirt (vs 4).

Second, seed fell onto a thin layer of soil atop stony ground. The seed sprang up fast and died fast because the thin soil allowed only shallow roots, and shallow roots will not sustain a plant in torrid weather (vs 5-6).

None of this would seem unusual to Jesus’ audience. If anything sounded strange, it would be the amazing yields of the good soil. Jesus said the increase would be thirty, sixty, or a hundred to one at a time when ten to one was considered successful.

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Jesus finishes by asking His readers to reflect: Do you have ears to hear? Scholars who study the parables commonly say parable parables present a truth that strikes like a thunderbolt or the punch line of a joke. It is true that we have to “get” some parables, but parables can be more like onions, having multiple layers.

The first layer seems clear. Although the seed is the same, the results vary. The controlling factor is the character of the soils. The farmer does his work, but the results hinge on the nature of the soil upon which the seed falls.

There is a simple lesson here. The same labor can yield widely varying results. Sometimes a salesman makes forty calls and nothing happens. Then he calls three more people and makes three sales. This is true, even important, but hardly novel. Why does Jesus bother to say it? Because there is another later, if we have ears to hear (vs 9).

The meaning of the soils (Matt 13:18-23)

The disciples certainly did not grasp the parable at once, but at least they wanted to understand. So they asked Jesus why He spoke in parables. He replied, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (vs 11), then He revealed what the parable meant.

The four soils represent four types of people and four types of response to God’s word – not an exhaustive list but the leading categories. Later, Jesus reveals His role in the parable. He is the sower: “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man” (vs 37). The parable, therefore, represents what happens when Jesus proclaims the Word of God. It explained what had happened that very day. How could the Israelites reject His ministry? Satan snatches the Word away from some people, so they never really hear it.

Others take superficial interest in the Word. There is joy, briefly, but it fades fast. The work interests them, but wealth and success interest them more, and that stunts their response.

Some truly listen, of course. They understand and believe and the Word bears abundant fruit. We might label these three types deaf listeners, superficial listeners, and fruitful listeners.

Deaf listeners (Matt 13:18-19)

Sometimes the Word falls on ears and hearts that are as hard as a path packed down until it is like concrete (vs 19). Such people hardly hear what Jesus says. They needed, above all, to listen to the mysteries of the kingdom (vs 11). In the New Testament, a mystery is a truth no one would know unless God revealed it – which He did. The great mystery is that Jesus, truly God and truly man, came to earth and performed mighty deeds to testify that He is the Messiah. The crowds heard this, but they did not understand.

The disciples also lacked understanding at times, but the crowds were content in their ignorance. Careless listeners, they never bent their minds to Jesus’ message. The Word made the faintest impression on them, the kind of impression seeds make on hard-packed earth. If asked, they might say they liked to watch Jesus and listen to Him. But their watching and listening amounted to nothing. Since their observations lacked an organizing principle, they slipped from their minds. Thus Satan snatched the Word from them.

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Lynne Trusse wrote a book on punctuation entitled *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. The title comes from a sign outside the panda habitat at a zoo. The sign should have read: "Eats shoots and leaves." That is, pandas eat two things: shoots and leaves. Instead, the sign, fashioned by someone who knew not the comma, read: "Eats, shoots and leaves." This means pandas do three things: eat, shoot, and leave. We imagine a surly panda getting into an altercation at a restaurant, firing several rounds into the ceiling, then fleeing the scene. One day Trusse was signing copies of the book when a bedraggled woman approached her table and moaned, "Oh, I'd love to learn about punctuation!"

The author smiled, "Then this is the book for you." She picked up her pen and waited. But the woman, acting as if the author had disagreed, replied, "No, I mean it. I really would love to know how to do it. I did learn it at school, but I've forgotten it now and I put everything in the wrong place."

The author nodded, "Shall I sign it to anyone in particular?" But the woman kept up her lament, "I'm quite ashamed really, so I'd love to know about punctuation, but there's just nowhere you can turn." The poor author sat there, tempted to thump the woman with her book, while internally imploring her impecunious interlocutor to leave.

So it goes. Some people simply will not be helped. They call out for the truth, for a word from God. They pray, "Say something, if you are out there." God had already exceeded this request. He visited our earth, spoke, lived in perfect justice and love, died, rose, and moved His servants to write it all down. This book is even translated into our own tongues so we can consult it when we wish. Yet some lament, "If only God would speak to me." He has, but we must listen!

Superficial listeners (Matt 13:20-21)

The second flawed response to the word is superficial enthusiasm. Jesus says the seed that falls on rocky places represents those who hear the Word with initial enthusiasm, but quickly fall away.

Occasionally, a visitor greets me at the door and say, "Pastor, this is the best sermon I've heard this year." I've learned that for many who say this, that morning's sermon is the only one they heard that year. They are enthusiastic but shallow; I never see them again.

People can be excited about the faith, but as soon as trouble or persecution comes, they turn away. Most versions translate the Greek verb (*skandalizo*) with "fall away." It certainly can mean to stumble or to fall. But the more common meaning is "take offence," and that meaning fits perfectly here. Thus, Jesus has fair-weather friends, but worse, the minute the life of faith becomes difficult, they are offended, because it's not what they expected. This amounts to a preemptive strike against the prosperity gospel. Jesus says we should expect persecution (Matt 5:11-12). Nonetheless, some think having faith means all will go well; when hardships come, they abandon the faith.

The lessons of our parable are clear. We must understand that Jesus spoke in parables both to give us the gift of revelation that comes in a thought-provoking yet memorable form. Parables take the truth away from those who spurn it. Let us therefore listen carefully to God's Word, appropriating all His truth and shunning the insensitive and superficial responses that we expect from unbelievers. Above all, we must hear and then believe in the Sower, God's Messiah and kingdom-bringer, Jesus Christ.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am** and **4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 12/07/2009	Next Week: 19/07/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Rev & Mrs Ki to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	What is a Christian? – Part 3	What is a Christian? – Part 5	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 2:1-10	Ephesians 2:1-10	
<i>Organist:</i>	Grace	Anthony	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	John Poh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Rev Ki will be here for the months of July and August. Pray for his visa application. • DHW Bible Study today: Today, we will cover Lesson 11 (Genesis 13 & 14). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 12 (Genesis 15). • Pray for those who are sick: - Yetta's mum (upcoming chemotherapy sessions), Constance (ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid and skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (Asthma, Hay fever, lost her voice) • Pray for those who are on travel: Sophia (Singapore), Lee-Wei (Singapore), Nicolas (Belgium), Rachel (Singapore) • Pray for those who are still progressing with their studies: Yetta, Hubert, Joshua • Pray for visa applications: Grace (China and UK), Joshua (Student visa) • Pray for Pastor & Mrs Ki's sons (Daniel and Samuel) for their studies (medicine and pharmacy), spiritual life and that they can look after themselves.
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	What is a Christian? – Part 4	What is a Christian? – Part 6	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 2:1-10	Ephesians 2:1-10	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Hubert	Grace	
Other Duties			
	Today: 12/07/2009	Next Week: 19/07/2009	
<i>Ushers</i>	Jonathan / Daniel	Sharon / Yetta	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Mrs Ki	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	John	Joshua	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 17 July	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: No YAF	
Sat 18 July	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by John Poh	
<u>Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £406.40		Lunch: £32.90	
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>The Blessing of Doing</u></h2> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;"><i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i></p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 0;">It is the building of character that should be our central aim in all life. Business, school, home, church, reading, pleasure, struggle, work, sorrow, all are but means to the one end. I do not care how much money you men made last year; but let me ask earnestly what mark last year's business made upon your character. The growth of one's manhood is of infinitely more importance than the growth of one's fortune. Everything we do leaves its impress within, upon our soul. We are building life all the while, whatever we are doing. The work itself may fail, but in the worker's disappointment, amid the failure of his plans, the work on his character goes on. Even in defeats the struggling leaves a recompense within. Giving, though nothing good comes from the gift, blesses the giver.</p>			