

Jesus Knows: John 2:23-25
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Jesus knows. He knows everything about you. That might not sound like good news at first. It might sound like the way parents use Santa Clause as a way to get their kids to behave. "He's making a list, He's checking it twice; He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake; He knows when you've been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake!"

I think of Ralphie in *A Christmas Story*. After the traumatic experience with the Santa Clause in the department store, after Ralphie finally makes his request for the Red Ryder BB gun and then lands at the bottom of that slide, Ralphie's dad asks, "Did he ask you if you'd been a good boy all year?" Ralphie said, "No." And his dad replied, "Don't worry, he knows. He always knows."

Santa's fictional omniscience is not good news for us. It might be a cute story to tell, but there's nothing there to change your life. It's a moralistic means of motivating good behavior.

Jesus' omniscience is not fictional, but real. And if you're truly trusting in Him, and therefore forgiven by Him, then this truth about Him is very Good News. It's something that should inspire awe in us, like it did for Nathanael in chapter 1. Jesus said to Nathanael in John 1:48, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Do you remember Nathanael's response? He said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Meditating on the fact that Jesus knows should prompt us, also, to worship Jesus as the Son of God, the King of Israel. He is the Messiah. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is God in the flesh.

And as we reflect on Jesus' complete knowledge of each one of us, we should keep in mind what Jesus has done for us. And this, by the way, is where Jesus is completely different than the idea of Santa. The myth of Santa's knowledge has to do with this list that determines who is naughty and who is nice. But Jesus knows that each and every one of us has been naughty. We've all sinned grievously against Almighty God. We deserve punishment. And therefore Jesus goes to the cross to pay that penalty for us.

If there's anything I want you to take away from this sermon it's this: Jesus knows you completely. He knows how bad you are. And He died for you. That is the pinnacle of true love. He knows you better than anybody else, meaning He knows your deepest, darkest secrets. In fact, He knows you better than you

know yourself. You may naively think too highly of yourself. In fact, you probably do. We all probably do. Jesus knows the depth of your badness. And He loves you. In spite of what He knows about you, He loves you. He died on the cross to take that penalty upon Himself.

The few verses we're going to study this morning show us that Jesus knows us. He knows our sin. And He knows whether our faith in Him is genuine or not. So the question for each of us as we consider these things this morning is whether or not you truly know Jesus. When He looks into the depth of your soul, what does He see? Does He see someone who is pretending to be a Christian? Or does He see someone who is authentically clinging to Him, resting in His saving work on the cross?

My prayer is that God will use this message to give each of us spiritual discernment into our own personal lives. Maybe some here today will realize that your profession of faith is actually empty. It's actually just words and a hollow hope. And I hope that as you realize that you'll then be truly born again.

I'm going to say a few things about these verses at the end of John 2, which serve as an introduction to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, which we'll begin studying next Sunday. And then a good portion of this morning's message will be from Jesus' parable of the soils, which is found in the Synoptic Gospels—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There were many different directions I considered taking in this sermon. But I decided to focus on this one main thing: the fact that Jesus knows the authenticity of your faith, or lack thereof. He knows whether you are "believing" in the way the crowds "believed" Him, simply because they were in awe of His power. But it was not a true faith. It was not a lasting faith. Jesus knows if your faith is empty, "dead" as James 2 calls it. Or if you have a genuine faith that not only marvels at His power to perform miracles but also submits to Him and trusts His teaching and rests in His sacrificial work for us.

There were all kinds of reactions to Jesus' ministry. Many flat out rejected Him, as John alerts us to right away in the prologue of this book. John 1:11 says, "He [Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." That's discouraging. The next verse, though, gives us a hopeful statement, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

What we learn in our passage this morning is that there are those who would never say that they are rejecting Jesus. Just the opposite. They would say they are receiving Jesus. They would

say they are, indeed, believing in Jesus' name. But it's not a genuine faith. Jesus sees right through it.

Jesus has performed these many signs / miracles. He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Verse 23 refers to the signs He was doing in Jerusalem. John doesn't give us details about these signs, but at the very end of the book (the very last verse in the Gospel of John) he writes this: "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

We don't know what these specific miracles were, but there may have been a great number of them. And the crowds are in awe. Many are "believing" in His name because they see His power to heal, His power over creation. They haven't seen anything like this before, and they are amazed.

Verse 24, though, is very interesting. This shows us Jesus' knowledge, His knowledge of the true condition of their hearts. Jesus did not entrust himself to them. It doesn't quite come across in the translation, but it's helpful to realize that the same Greek word is used in verse 23 and in verse 24. Where it says in verse 23, "many *believed* in his name," the same Greek word for "believe" is also used in verse 24 to say that Jesus did not "entrust" himself to them. Outwardly it seemed that they believed Him. But He didn't believe them. They appeared to be trusting in Him. But He didn't trust them.

In other words, Jesus didn't *believe* that their *believing* was real. He didn't *trust* the validity of their so-called *trust*. And Jesus certainly wasn't going to pander to the crowds. Especially when the crowds had only a very shallow faith in Him. That's not at all what His ministry was about. He wasn't performing these miracles just to gain a vast following of superficial fans. He saw right through the masses of people who were enamored with Him simply because of the signs He could do.

He knows the human heart. He knows all people. He knows what is in man. And He knows there are many who outright reject Him. He also knows there are many who will give lip-service to Him, who may even think they are believing in Him, but it's only a fascination with something or other about Him . . . minus the deep repentance and submission and trust that comes with genuine conversion. They haven't been born again. They're not yet new creatures in Christ. We'll learn more about that next week as we study Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

But now I want to expand on this study of Jesus' knowledge by looking at the parable of the soils. This is one of Jesus' teachings that is recorded in each of the other 3 Gospels, but doesn't appear in John. And I think this parable will help us each

to do some self-diagnosis. We can pray that the Spirit will help us in this, that we will have the insight to see ourselves as Jesus sees us.

Remember, you don't have any secrets with Jesus. He knows everything about you. He knows everything about everyone. He knows about all of Hillary Clinton's emails. And He knows about all of Donald Trump's tax returns. And He knows about all of our emails and tax returns too. There are no secrets with Him. Most importantly, He knows the true condition of our hearts. He knows if we have a genuine faith in Him that receives His forgiveness, or a superficial faith which cannot save.

Let's turn to the Gospel of Luke, the book of the Bible right before John.

Read Luke 8:5-8, 11-15

As we study these different soils, let's each be considering the question: which soil describes the condition of my heart? Jesus knows the condition of each of our hearts. We need Him to show that to us.

The Hard Path

The first type of soil Jesus describes is the hard path. This is the dirt path that has been beaten down by the pounding of feet and hoofs and the weight of carts. It has become as hard as pavement. So when the seed falls on it there is no chance of it actually penetrating down into the ground. It just sits there on the surface, and the birds come and devour it. In the explanation, in verse 12, Jesus reveals that these birds represent the devil.

The hard path represents the hard heart. This is the person who will absolutely not receive the word. This can take many forms. It may be the antagonistic atheist who passionately argues against the claims of Christianity. Or it may be the casual skeptic or agnostic who has given some thought to spiritual things but remains undecided.

This hard ground could also describe someone who actually attends church and is involved in different ways. But whenever the word goes forth there is a wall there that keeps the word from ever piercing the heart. Could that be you this morning? Could it be that you attend church because it makes you feel good about yourself or because you feel like certain people expect that of you, but you refuse to actually change the way you live? You're still holding onto the same old sins and walking in the ways of the world, unrepentant and unresponsive to the call of the Gospel?

If you have ears to hear this, please hear it. May this word go down into your heart and regenerate you. I pray that today the hard ground of your heart will break and crumble and soften so that you will be good soil.

Rocky Ground

The second kind of soil is the rocky ground. First look at how it's described in verse 6, "And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture." Verse 13 explains, "And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away."

I remember a vivid example of this. When I was in middle school, in 6th or 7th grade, there was a girl who sat at my lunch table, and she was in some of my classes. And she was a rebel. Pretty much everything about her communicated that attitude. But I remember one day at the lunch table she shared with everyone that over the weekend she had been at some kind of Christian gathering and she had been saved. And for several days she seemed like a different person. Her language was different, her attitude was different, she was talking about the Lord and seemed to have a real desire to follow Christ. But it lasted such a short time, as I recall. It was only a matter of weeks before she was back to her former self.

That is the rocky ground. The word is received with joy, but there's no root. And a key question for us is how to interpret that kind of experience. What are we to conclude about the salvation of individuals who would fall into this category? Are we to say that the person was saved and then lost their salvation? No. The idea that a person can lose their salvation does not square with Scripture. Just to give one text, Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." This is the perseverance of the saints. For those who are truly saved, they will persevere to the end. God will preserve their faith and keep them believing and bring that good work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. So it's not the case that the person described by the rocky soil was initially saved and was then unsaved. That doesn't happen.

Could it be then that the person was saved and then simply became unfruitful? They will still go to heaven. They are just unproductive in the Christian life. Many people would argue for this position, and many others just assume it. If a person makes a profession of faith then they must be saved, right? If they act excited about the Gospel, even if it's only for a short time, then they can have assurance of salvation. We may be disappointed by their wayward life and lack of fruit, but at least we know they'll go to heaven because they said that prayer at the revival meeting or the youth camp or wherever it might have been.

That interpretation does not square with Scripture either. The point of this parable is not to differentiate fruitful Christians

and unfruitful Christians. The point is to differentiate Christians and non-Christians. True believers bear fruit in their lives. Unbelievers do not bear fruit, even if they call themselves Christians. In Matthew 7 Jesus talks about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing. And He says, "You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit." Now, listen to what He says next, because here He makes it clear that He's not saying that it's just a matter of fruitfulness and unfruitfulness. Rather, it's a matter of heaven and hell. He says, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:15-20)

What do we have to conclude, then? The person who produces bad fruit, or no fruit, is someone who was never truly converted (is not yet converted). This may challenge what you've always thought about salvation, but this is biblical Christianity. Becoming a Christian is not just saying a few words and going through a few rituals. A lot of people do that and their lives stay exactly the same. Or maybe they change for a little while and then go right back to normal. That kind of scenario shows us that the Gospel did not really take root.

For the person represented by the rocky soil, it is times of testing that cause them to fall away. There may be an excitement about the Gospel as long as things are going well. But as soon as the trials come, they're done. This is why we need to talk often about the role of suffering in the Christian life. If we tell people that they are going to be healthy and wealthy, and everything in life will go well when they come to Jesus, that's a very effective way of producing false converts. People can get excited about health and wealth without being converted. Those are the very things our carnal hearts are drawn to. So it makes perfect sense when individuals receive the word with joy, because they think this Christianity thing is going to be the quick fix they've been looking for. But then they get sick, or they lose their job, or someone scoffs at them because of Christ, and they fall away.

This week I heard just a few minutes of an interview on Family Life Today, a Christian radio program. They were interviewing Dave and Gloria Furman. I've met Dave before through the network of pastors connected with Capitol Hill Baptist Church, and Dave and I have mutual friends in the Middle East. He pastors a church in the United Arab Emirates. They have a significant trial in their lives, which is Dave's physical disabilities. This began to present itself not long after they moved to the Middle East. Dave began having severe pain in his arms and

hands, and it has really limited what he's able to do. His wife has to buckle his seat belt for him. Others have to drive him where he needs to go. His children will help him to button up his shirt. There are many things he can't do because of these physical trials.

On this interview he shared briefly how he will often have individuals come up to him who have that health and wealth mentality about Christianity, and they'll say to him, "You know, you're a pastor. You're close to God. Ask for healing, and you'll be healed." And Dave said, "Of course I do pray for healing. But I also trust in the sovereign God who often chooses not to grant healing." (paraphrase)

That's exactly the kind of thing we need to communicate. Health is not the Gospel. Wealth is not the Gospel. Clinging to Jesus whether or not the healing comes, whether or not the financial provision is there—that's where our real hope is. Our hope is in Him.

The Bible does not promise health and wealth and prosperity. Instead the Bible promises tribulation and persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." That doesn't sound pleasant. But for those who are truly converted we can see that Christ is better than earthly comforts. And we can even begin to see the wonder of how God uses trials and persecution in our lives to sanctify us and give us a deeper joy in Him. Trials will test our faith and refine our faith and deepen our faith. And sadly, in many cases trials will show that a person's professed faith is no real faith. That is what we learn from the rocky soil.

Thorny Ground

The third type of soil that is described is the thorny ground. Verse 7, "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." We all know that weeds grow faster and more vigorously than the grass or the plants that we want to grow. That's what is happening here. The seed falls on ground where thorny weeds are also beginning to grow. And as the two grow up together, the thorns choke out the good seed. Again, this is a picture of someone who professed faith and appeared to be growing in the Lord, but falls away. Their lack of abiding fruit demonstrates this. It is not that they were saved and then lost their salvation. And it's not the case that they are saved but bear no fruit, for that is not a category that exists in the Bible. Like the rocky ground, the thorny ground is a person who professes faith but has no real faith. The difference is the means by which this person falls away. The person represented by the rocky soil fell away due to tribulation and persecution. The person represented by the thorny soil falls away due to worldly pleasures.

Look at verse 14. “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” Pain and pleasure can both be a means of falling away. A person can be driven from the Gospel because of the tribulation and persecution that are associated with it. Or a person can be enticed away from the Gospel by worldly pleasures.

So the question is, what do you ultimately desire? What is your treasure? Which is also to say, what are you trusting in, really? Are you being enticed by riches and the pleasures of life? Or are you fighting to believe the truth of Scripture?

Both pain and pleasure can be ways that individuals fall away from the truth. Maybe there was a profession of faith at one point, but then pain and persecution drive one away from Christ, or the pleasures of riches entice one away from Christ. In either case, we have to conclude that the profession of faith was an empty one. It was not a true conversion, and Jesus can see that.

Jesus can see if there’s just a superficial excitement about Him, maybe about His power to do signs, like we see in John 2. They were “believing” in His name, but Jesus knew they weren’t truly surrendering their lives to Him. They weren’t really trusting Him.

John Calvin says this about the individuals referred to here in John 2, “that faith depended solely on miracles, and had no root in the Gospel, and therefore could not be steady or permanent. Miracles do indeed assist the children of God in arriving at the truth; but it does not amount to actual believing, when they admire the power of God so as merely to believe that it is true, but not to subject themselves wholly to it.”

That’s a key point. Plenty of people can show enthusiasm about Jesus, but if they aren’t willing to submit themselves to Jesus as the Lord of their life, Jesus will be able to see right through that. He’ll be able to see that it’s not actual believing.

Good Soil

Finally, the good soil. Verse 8 says, “And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” And then the explanation is in verse 15, “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” This is the encouraging part of the parable. The encouragement comes in the fact that there is good soil. As we proclaim the Gospel we will be disappointed when we see people reject the Gospel outright, or when they seem to accept it but then fall away. But we must know that there is also good soil out there. There are hearts that will not only hear the word, but will accept it and bear fruit. In all 4 cases the person

hears the word. But only in this last case does the person hear the word, accept it and bear fruit. And it's the fruit-bearing that shows that this is the true believer. This is the person who is truly converted. And, indeed, there will be much fruit: a hundredfold. Lest we be discouraged by the three soils that do not produce fruit, we're told here of great yields that come from the good soil. I hope that's you. I hope that's what is happening in your life.

God's Glory

I want to say something about how God's glory is at stake in all of this. I want us to think briefly about how God's glory is seen in the way He has chosen to save sinners. Why does God choose to save in this way? Why is it that the true converts are those who bear fruit? Why doesn't God save people who merely make a profession of faith, who are merely enamored by Jesus' power or His example? Wouldn't it be more gracious of God to save those represented by all the soils, rather than just the last one? Why doesn't God have mercy on every person who prays the sinner's prayer, even those who continue to live in sin afterwards, even those who don't bow the knee in submission to Him?

The reason is that God does everything for His own glory, and He would get no glory by granting salvation to those who will not praise Him throughout the course of their lives. Think about it. These many individuals in John 2 who are believing in Jesus' name simply because they saw Jesus' signs. But Jesus knows their faith is hollow. That kind of superficial fanfare is not glorifying to God. Or if a person merely says a prayer at a revival because the music and the rhetoric got their emotions going, but then they go right back to their worldly lifestyle, what does that say about God? It says that we may be willing to use God to get eternal life, but we don't actually think much of God, Himself. We may be willing to jump through a few hoops thinking it might get us into heaven, but we won't submit to God's commands for us now. We may trust Him for the afterlife, but not this life. That kind of attitude is terribly demeaning to God. And it is not God's character to act in ways that bring eternal scorn on His Name. Therefore He does not grant salvation to those who do not bear fruit by submitting to Him and honoring Him and following Him. He will not be Savior without also being Lord.

If God were to save individuals who do not bear fruit, it would cheapen the Gospel by making it merely a get out of hell coupon rather than a powerful inner transformation that makes us love the things we ought to love. This is the beauty of the Gospel, and this is how it redounds to God's glory. As God changes our lives by changing our desires, He shows that His glory is more precious than worldly pleasures and possessions. I'm not at all

implying that we become perfect or sinless or anything close to that. But there is a change. God saves us and changes us (indeed, He causes us to be born again, as Jesus is going to explain to Nicodemus). And in this way He shows the supreme value of who He is.

Sadly, there are many who think they are saved but are not. They have reduced the Gospel to a cheap ticket, and they do not value God. They do not value the cross. They do not hate their sin. They have not truly repented or believed. For these individuals the judgment will be a very rude awakening. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Remember that Jesus knows. And that doesn't need to be a scary thing. It doesn't need to be bad news. Jesus knows you completely. He knows how bad you are. And He died for you. That is the pinnacle of true love. So cry out to Him in prayer. If you're not sure whether or not you're a true believer, cry out to Him for help. Tell Him that you don't want to be a fake Christian. Admit that you need help even to discern your own heart. Tell Him you want to be a true believer. Tell Him that you want to be born again. That's what we'll talk more about next Sunday.