

The Foolishness Of Preaching Part IV

The Foolishness Preaching

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One thing I would mention to you tonight and would like for you to start thinking about, the March for Life will be coming up in January. Brother Jed, is it the Friday, the 19th? And as always, we will be chartering a bus to go. The seats are \$50 and it's a bargain for somebody else to do the driving and put you right in downtown Washington and pick you up and bring you back home. We make the trip in a day and it is a long day but it is a way for us to make a practical demonstration of our opposition to abortion in this country. So time to start planning and thinking about it and praying as to what the Lord would have you to do.

Luke 8 is where we are turning in our Bibles tonight. Luke 8 and let's read at verse 4.

4 And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: 5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. 8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we pray tonight that you would speak to our hearts from your word. What a blessing it is to come together for a few moments on this evening and look into your word to see the thoughts that you have for us, these moments when you give us an opportunity to think your thoughts after you. We pray that you might help us to see the importance of preaching in this hour. We pray that you might help us tonight to see the importance of having a soft and a tender heart toward the things of thine. We thank you for each one who has come here tonight and we praise your blessings upon them in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tonight as we continue to think about the importance of preaching the word of God, and as we continue to look at the Lord's preaching here, we come to the last ground, the last hearer, the last heart in this parable of the sower and that is the good ground here. Verse 8 tells us that "other fell on good ground," other seed fell on good ground, and perhaps the question that comes to mind, the question that we ought to consider as we have been talking about the other three grounds in this parable, is what is good ground? What is different about this ground that the seed that fell there as we see in verse 8, "sprang up and bare fruit"? What is different about this heart that it received the seed of the word of God? That's what we want to think about this evening.

There are certainly a number of different ways to answer that question but one way is to consider that this good ground is everything that the other three grounds are not. The first ground that we talked about in verse 5 is the way side ground and Luke tells us that it was trodden down. Ground that is trodden down is hard ground and so good ground would be the opposite of that. Good ground is not trodden down; good ground is not hard ground and one thing that brings to mind is youth. One thing that brings to mind is young people. There is a softness in our hearts in our youth like no other time in our lives. That's why Christian education is so critical and that's why Christian education is to begin in the womb.

We are entering the Christmas season and one of the things that we read about in Luke's Gospel is John the Baptist. We read about his birth and we read how when John the Baptist heard Mary's salutation before he was born, when he heard Mary's salutation to his mother, Elizabeth, that Mary was going to conceive in her womb and bring forth a son and call his name Jesus, when he heard that this child shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest, when John the Baptist heard Mary's words that the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father, David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end, when he heard the words of Mary's salutation that, "the holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," we read there in Luke 1 that he leapt, John leapt in his mother Elizabeth's womb. This is just another example of how the Bible has been ahead of science and what we learn from the Bible and specifically from John the Baptist, is that education begins in the womb. A lot of people, including some Christians, may not believe that but I'll tell you somebody that does believe it: Satan believes it. That's one reason that everywhere you go, in some places it's so bad that you literally at times have to ask somebody to turn it down, what you hear blaring is rock music. He not only wants to infiltrate the minds and hearts of the people who are in the store, the people that you can see, but he wants to begin infiltrating the minds and hearts of those who are in the womb.

I came across a little article. It's from the website sciencemag.org, and this is the title of it, "Babies Learn to Recognize Words in the Womb."

"Be careful what you say around a pregnant woman. As a [baby] grows inside a mother's belly, it can hear sounds from the outside world—and can understand them well enough to retain memories of them after birth, according to new research.

It may seem implausible that [babies] can listen to speech within the womb, but the sound-processing parts of their brain become active in the last trimester of pregnancy..."

And just for the record, that's when Mary went to see her cousin, Elizabeth. Luke 1:36 says of Elizabeth, "and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren." Elizabeth was entering into the last trimester of her pregnancy. God is telling us over 2,000 years ago what science has finally caught up with and acknowledged and that is that,

"...the sound-processing parts of their brain [of a baby's brain] become active in the last trimester of pregnancy, and sound carries fairly well through the mother's abdomen. 'If you put your hand over your mouth and speak, that's very similar to the situation the [baby] is in,' says cognitive neuroscientist Eino Partanen [I hope I got his name right] of the University of Helsinki."

And this is what he said that I thought was very interesting,

"'You can hear the rhythm of speech, rhythm of music, and so on.'

A 1988 study suggested that newborns recognize the theme song from their mother's favorite soap opera. More recent studies have expanded on the idea of [babies] learning [in the womb], indicating that newborns already familiarized themselves with sounds of their parent's native language..."

Folks, education begins in the womb and that's when Christian education is to begin, in the womb. Pregnant ladies coming to church, their babies hearing the singing, hearing songs like the Hallelujah Chorus, they can hear it and there is a processing that begins to take place in the last trimester of the pregnancy.

It begins in the womb. That's where a Christian education begins and it is to continue after we are born into this world. That's why God says in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go." That's why God says to Israel, said to Israel and he says it to us in Deuteronomy 6:6 and 7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." The Lord says it again in Deuteronomy 11:18 and 19, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

The battle that has been raging and is raging around us for the tender hearts of the children of this country, in fact the battle is being fought on the ground of the hearts of

the children of this nation. That's why this message that the Lord Jesus preached about the ground of the heart is so critically important, and particularly the ground of the hearts of children.

From time to time here in this church, you'll hear one of us mention Dr. Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago. Dr. Bloom has passed away. I believe he passed away in 1999. He was an educational psychologist of some renown. He was the Director of Research for the Conference on Education for the US Department of Education, and Dr. Bloom said something that is very important: 50% of the intellectual capacity of an adult has been developed by the age of four, and 80% by age eight. Folks, that's why Satan was so driven to take over the educational system in this country, an educational system that started off as Christian. The reason children in the Colonies were taught to read is so they could read the Bible. The reason Harvard and some of these Ivy League schools incredibly enough were started was to train preachers of the Gospel.

Satan was driven to take over the educational system in this country and turn it upside down and he stated his philosophy and he stated his purpose through a former Baptist turned Unitarian preacher by the name of Charles Potter. He founded the first Humanist Society of New York. He wrote in 1930 in his book "Humanism, A New Religion," and by the way, the Supreme Court of the United States agrees with the title of Mr. Potter's book. In a case in 1961, *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the Supreme Court listed secular humanism among the religions that do not teach a belief in God but they listed it as a religion. It is a religion. Listen to what Mr. Potter said about the connection between humanism and the American public school system. I've read you this quote before but it's worth hearing again. He said,

"Education is thus a most powerful ally of humanism, and every American [public] school is a school of humanism."

I would modify Mr. Potter's statement slightly to say that every American public school is a church of humanism. Mr. Potter goes on,

"What can a theistic Sunday school's meeting for an hour once a week and teaching only a fraction of the children do to stem the tide of the five-day program of humanistic teaching?"

The answer, of course, is they can't do hardly anything.

I was reading some statistics. I apologize, I didn't write them down and my mind doesn't hold onto them as good as it used to, but it's amazing the number of churches that no longer have Sunday school, and then you couple that with the declining attendance in so many of the churches who do have Sunday school and you get an idea of Mr. Potter's words here. But there's another way to look at his words that puts this question in perspective, to think about it in terms of public education in this country. There are 55 million elementary and secondary school children in the United States. Only 9% or 4.5 million of them attend private church related schools. Another 3% or 1.7 million attend

private non-church related schools. That's like Wallace O'Neal here. So those schools are just private public schools, if you will. Two million children, 3.6% about, are homeschooled. But again, not all homeschools are Christian-based. Many parents' decision to homeschool their children has little or nothing to do with Christianity. And when you consider that of that 9% of students who attend private church related schools, about half of them attend Catholic schools. That gives you an idea of the magnitude of Charles Potter's statement because of the 55 million school age children in this country, only about 5 1/2% attend what we might think of as evangelical or fundamental Christian schools. So when you put all these numbers together, the devil is educating somewhere very close to 91% of the elementary and secondary school children in the United States. Evangelical and fundamental Christian schools are educating 5 1/2%. The rest are in private non-church related schools and homeschools.

Martin Luther told us about the danger of this situation. He told us nearly 400 years before Charles Potter wrote his very boastful statement, Martin Luther said back in the 1500's, "I am much afraid that schools will prove to be great gates of hell." And they have.

"I am much afraid that schools will prove to be great gates of hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth."

I want you to listen to this, what Martin Luther said.

"I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount."

Don't put your children in a public school, that's what he's saying. Now, he didn't use that language but you and I can use that language, yet how many Christians go right ahead and do that?

"I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount." And that's exactly what Satan has done. The Scriptures no longer reign paramount in the public schools in this nation. He has taken them out of the public schools and he has done that because, just like God, Satan knows the value of a tender heart. He's the great imitator. He is training up children in the way that he wants them to go.

He is diligently teaching the children of this nation and he begins in the womb and he continues his teaching even before they get to public schools. He continues his teaching in daycare. That's why we have all of these different programs. Here in North Carolina, we've got the federal Head Start Program. Here in North Carolina, we've had Smart Start, we've had More at Four. I don't know how many others but all of these government programs that are built on the idea that childcare is more than just meeting the physical needs of children, it's more than custodial care while their parents work, the emphasis is on child development and the first five years of life before they ever get to the first grade, because as Benjamin Bloom said, 50% of the intellectual capacity of an adult has been

developed by the age of four. The devil is a smart fellow. He's very wise in his plans in what he wants to accomplish.

We're talking about good ground tonight. We're talking about the softness of good ground, the softness in the hearts of young people. Look back for just a minute at Exodus 12, if you will. Exodus 12. You're familiar with this portion of Scripture, Exodus 12 is the Passover chapter. It's the chapter where God teaches his people about the Passover lamb and how that lamb is to be slain and how the blood of the lamb is to be placed on the side posts and on the upper door posts of the houses where they were. He says in verse 13 of Exodus 12, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" God is teaching his people that it's the blood that makes atonement for the soul. It's the blood of the Lamb that maketh an atonement for the soul. And this Passover service that the children of Israel were to keep looked forward to the time, it looked forward to the very day when John the Baptist would look and he would see the Lord Jesus coming and he would say, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Here was Christ, our Passover, who had come to be sacrificed on the cross of Calvary, the Lamb who would shed his blood so that all who would by faith apply his blood to their hearts would have the promise of God that, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague," the judgment of God, "shall not be upon you to destroy you." That's the picture here.

That's the message of this first Passover and it was a message of every subsequent Passover and that's why God says, if you look at verse 24 of Exodus 12, "And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service." Now notice verse 26, "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." God says to the children of Israel, "I want your children in this service, this service that is full of pictures, this service that is full of symbolism, this service that is deep in meaning. I don't want your children left at home. I want them in that service. I don't want them in children's church, I want them in that service, and I want them there because this service is going to stir up a question in their minds. It's going to stir up a question in their hearts and the question is this, 'What mean ye by this service? Dad, what does this service mean?'"

And there are two words in this 26th verse that we want to notice, the first one is the word "children," and the second one is the word "what." I think there is a connection between those two words. Think about the word "what." "What" is a word that is connected with children. Hang around a four or five-year-old for a while, "What's that? What's that over there? What's this?" "What" is a word that frames a question in the context of desiring knowledge. It frames a question in the context of obtaining information.

"What mean ye by this service?" There is an innocence in that question. There is a childlikeness in that question, an innocence, a childlikeness that honestly wants to know the meaning of what is taking place. It's interesting to me that the interrogative word, the

question word that is used here to ask this question is "what" and not "why" and I think that's important because "why" is a word that questions the cause or the purpose of the reason behind something.

It's been Gail and my experience in raising five sons that there is a difference between a question that begins with "what" and a question that begins with "why." There is a childlikeness in the word "what." There is a childishness in the word "why." When children stop asking "what" and start asking "why," it can be an indication that they are not questioning for information, they are not questioning for knowledge or learning, they are questioning in childishness and rebellion.

There came a time in my life when I didn't ask "what" of my parents, but I was constantly challenging them with "why." Why? There came a time in my life when I didn't ask "what" in a childlike way, but I asked "why" in a childish and rebellious way because, you see, there came a time in my life when I said, "I'm important. I'm important and I'm due an explanation." There came a time in my life when instead of asking, "What mean ye by this service?" the question that I asked was, "Why do I even have to go to this service?"

We're thinking about good ground. We're thinking about the characteristics of good ground. Good ground is not trodden down. Good ground is not hard ground. The good ground heart is a soft heart. It's a heart that is childlike. The good ground heart, the childlike heart says, "What mean ye by this service?" The childish rebellious heart says, "Why do you even have this service and why do I have to go to it?" And young people, when that change begins to take place in your heart, when the childlikeness of "what" begins to change to the childishness of "why," then I believe you're beginning to trample underfoot the Son of God. You're beginning to do despite unto the grace of God. You are beginning the hardening of your heart. That hardening process is beginning in the ground of your heart.

Turn over to the book of Ecclesiastes, if you will. The book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12. Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." God says remember now. That's a reminder that, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation."

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." In the days of thy youth when the ground of your heart is still tender.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not." What are the evil days? That may be a reference to a number of things but one thing that comes to mind is that the evil days are when our hearts begin to be trampled down by the cares of this world: by the deceitfulness of riches; by the lust of other things; by the pleasures of life; by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Another thing that comes to mind is that the evil days come when our will begins to exert itself. It's an evil day when we begin to push and strive and, if necessary, rebel and be

directly disobedient in order to have our own way and do as we please. It begins to manifest itself in the teenage years: 13, 14, 15, 16. That's about the time that we stop asking "what" and we start asking "why." That's when the evil days begin in earnest. That's when our rebellion begins to be more sophisticated. You know, when we get to be around 16, 17 years old, we even have the ability to put motors and wheels under our rebellion, we call that cars and they are quite a vehicle for rebellious young people. It's when we begin to in earnest to harden the ground of our heart.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not." Young people, one of the great privileges that you have is to come to Calvary Christian School. One of the great privileges that you have when you get into the seventh grade and on through the twelfth grade is to come to Chapel every day where you are taught in a very practical way to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. It's interesting to hear testimonies of some of the young people who have graduated from school and they have gone on with their lives and they come back here and so many times they'll say things like, "I wish I had listened in Chapel. I wish that I hadn't just passed that time away."

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not," notice these next words, "nor the years draw nigh." There is something here in this passage like there was in Numbers 21 this morning, that just jumps off the page and it is this: none of this in Ecclesiastes 12:1, in this verse time goes from days to years in a matter of just a few words. Time goes from youth to old age in just a few short words. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh."

There is a message in that and the message is this: what is your life? Brother Benny was talking about how quickly this year has gone. The first Sunday in December is coming up. December. It seems like it was just the first Sunday in January the day before yesterday. What is your life? "It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Our life goes from the days of our youth to the years drawing nigh, as fast as vapor appears and vanishes.

It's interesting. I love teaching here at the school and I love just to walk through the locker area. It's amazing what you learn. You don't have to say one word, just walk through there and just keep your ears open. Or walk by the kids as they are out there. I walked by a young lady the other day and I heard her say, "I cannot wait to be 18! I can't wait to be 18! It just can't get here soon enough!" And I looked at her and I said, "Don't wish your life away," I said, "because you're going to be 18," and she told me in how many months and I said, "about three months later it will seem like you'll be 40." Your life is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanisheth away and every time that you reject the Gospel, every time that you refuse to humble your heart and repent of your sin and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the ground of your heart gets a little harder.

In this meeting today, we've got a whole span, I guess. We've got children with tender hearts. We have young people who are just beginning to enter the "evil days." They are just beginning to enter that time when they want to have their own will and their own way; the time when they are just beginning to exert themselves; they are just beginning to stop asking "what" and start asking "why." The ground of your heart is still soft. You're just beginning to trample underfoot the Gospel. Then we have young adults here, other adults, and the ground of your heart is nowhere near as soft as it was when you were young. You stopped asking many years ago "what," and the only question you ask now is "why." "Why do I need to lose my life? Why do I need to surrender my heart? Why do I need to give myself? To give up myself, to give up all that I know? Why do I need to give up my will and my way and my plans? Why do I need the Lord Jesus Christ? I've gotten along just fine. I've made it for all these years. And besides, I come to church, I sing the songs, I give my money, I bring my Bible, I know the message. I can sing all about the story of Jesus because I know it from A-Z, I know it from beginning to end. I'm doing just fine in my life. Why? Why do I need to get saved?" You might not ever verbalize those words but that's your attitude of heart if you are lost, and every time that you have rejected the Gospel from the days of your youth until now, the ground of your heart has gotten harder and harder until today there is almost no soft ground left there.

While it is called today, whether you are a young person, whether you are an older person, while the ground of your heart is still soft enough to receive the seed of the word of God, while you can still hear the word and understand it, while you can still hear the Gospel and receive it, you need to be saved. You need to surrender your heart. You need to surrender your will. You need to repent of your sin and in childlikeness ask the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Savior. "Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Proverbs 29:1, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." That's why now you need to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you need to turn to him in repentance and faith and trust him to be your Savior. If we are saved tonight, now is the time for us to have a soft heart toward the things of the Lord and have a soft heart toward his word, to have a soft heart toward the working of his Spirit in our lives. To have a soft heart that he can use, that he can convict, that he can rake when necessary, that we might be that good ground hearer and bring forth much fruit.

Let's look to the Lord in a closing prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the preaching of the parable of the sower and we pray that you would help us as we study this sermon, study this message, that we might examine ourselves and see what kind of heart it is that we have. We pray for our young people tonight. We pray that you would bless them and help them as we start back to school tomorrow and the few short weeks that we have before the Christmas break, the few short weeks we have before the beginning of a new year. Help them to see even now in their youth the brevity of their life, the speed at which their life is passing, and the absolute necessity for them while it is called today, to trust you as their Savior. We pray that you would bless the teachers and the staff as we come back tomorrow. We pray that you would give us a renewed energy

and a renewed desire to be a blessing to you in the ministry that you have given to us that we might hold forth the word of life to these young people in these dark days in which we are living. We thank you for this church and we pray that you would continue to bless it and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.