

# A Parable for Distracted Disciples

T.J. CAMPO

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

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Luke 8.4-21

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*When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: 5 "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 "Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 "Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. 8 "Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

*9 His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. 10 And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.*

*11 "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. 12 "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. 13 "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

*16 "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. 17 "For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be*

*known and come to light. 18 "So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him."*

We're looking at the four Gospels... and specifically the theme of how Jesus Christ trained the twelve disciples. How do modern believers in Jesus Christ also come under this training? Is there a difference in being a believer in Jesus Christ and a disciple?

In this scene (as with last week) crowds are coming to Jesus Christ. Many of the people come to Him out of mere curiosity...some out of abject need and desperation... some come with questions or expectations and others come (increasingly, as the story unfolds) some come seeing Jesus Christ as a threat to be opposed.

His disciples, men and women, are on a kind of perpetual "field-trip". They're walking with Jesus Christ and constantly discovering things about Him, about the Kingdom of God and about themselves.

This section points to ONE indispensable QUALITY... It's discipleship boiled down to its most basic attribute ...to the ONE necessity all disciples must have. Without THIS, one cannot be a disciple.

The original disciples are looking out on the vast sea of people... and we could sympathize if they're a bit star-struck... because, suddenly they're famous (in the entourage!) And THIS parable is IN PART to help them see the crowds in a new way... the masses are NOT exactly what the disciples THINK THEY ARE.

Many people in the CROWD are not really getting it; some are DISTRACTED...and THAT is a VERY MODERN PROBLEM: we're facing a CRISIS OF FOCUS in this "age of distraction" ...and that's why this parable can be a big help to US...can redirect our spiritual distraction.

Let's look at 1) the DIVINE METHOD FOR FIGHTING DISTRACTION, and 2) the SINGULAR TAKE-AWAY that could save your life.

At this point we're introduced to that distinctive form of teaching called the parable... We find parables in other places in the Bible but Jesus Christ uses and MASTERS this art form like no one else... and we want to know, "WHY?"

Well...in short, HE COMES TO PEOPLE who are distractible. We live in a fallen world where things come up... things get in the way. We have laundry to fold... to pay rent or a mortgage... stay up on the news...laundry to fold... bills to pay ...appointments to keep... kids to feed...laundry to fold... "Both thorns and thistles the ground shall grow for you... by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3.18-19)

Frustration has been introduced...into the atmosphere ...into our work...relationships (with God, with others and with ourselves). Our thinking is affected ("noetic effects of sin") so we can't see clearly what's really important/valuable in life. Prioritizing is frustrated.

And yet we're "takin' care of business" in this less-than-hospitable environment and we get distracted with all our preparations (Luke 10.40) and our daily routines and stuff we gotta do... "If I don't do it - it aint gonna get done!"

It was like that for THEM...and it's like that for US only more so...distractions are apparently MULTIPLIED.

A recently report showed that despite amazing advances in automobile safety measures (air-bags and sensors and seatbelts, lightweight materials etc.) still the death rates from driving accidents are rising due to devices ... we're DISTRACTED in our driving.

And it's why we have a whole new vocabulary of "being present", "being in-the-moment", awareness, mindfulness and focus... AND another set of words meant to CAPTURE OUR ATTENTION...words like "extreme" and "awesome" and "radical" and "ultimate" and "epic" ...and "h u g e" ... One writer said, "Everything is "awesome," "mega," "massive" and "total..." (Andrew O'Hagan, "The Virtues of Fine in the Age of Awesome" New York Times Style Magazine; September 24, 2013)

Well...what IS that new vocabulary communicating but that IT IS VERY DIFFICULT to stay focused on the ordinary stuff of life... WE HAVE TO RATCHET IT UP to the extreme, just to be able to maintain our attention. AND I know this is the stuff of advertising but ... it's more than ever a part of modern life – we are hopelessly distracted... We have Marie Antoinette Syndrome: “Nothing Tastes” (Os Guinness: Smorgasbord Factor [The Last Christian on Earth: Uncover the Enemy's Plot to Undermine the Church – February 18, 2010]).

Another article I've referenced from the New Yorker; Joshua Rothman looks at a new theory of distraction that IT'S NOT ONLY our technology and media and all our “awesome, epic” language that's making us distracted – it's that WE WANT TO BE DISTRACTED.

It's a spiritual thing... like one comedian said, “we don't want to be alone for one second because it's so hard.” We're in flight from ourselves ... AND we all know that ...we're going to die (“to dust you shall return”) and we really don't want to THINK about that, “Somebody PLEASE distract ME!”

Jesus tells this story and as He tells it, it's ALSO playing out right before their eyes. It's about various responses to God's message and the disciples can see the responses right there in the crowd on that fateful day... The story is a parable and the event is parabolic.

A farmer goes out to plant seed. He scatters it liberally and he just lets it FLY. Some falls on the road where the ground is so hard the seed just lays there...gets trampled and the birds eat it. These are people who hear the Good News but before it even penetrates, dark spiritual powers (the devil) distracts them. Maybe Jesus has in mind, the religious people who thought His words were worthless; not devil-worshippers, just people who are closed. They pay no attention, otherwise occupied. Other seed fell on rocky soil...it's very shallow and water pools there so the seed grows quickly but that kind of soil ALSO dries up very quickly and the little sprouts die...no root. THESE are people who are sort of flighty/trendy: an emotional response but NO depth... When something ELSE comes along, they're distracted,

“they receive the word with joy; but they have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.” (13)

Then a third response: seed falling among the thorns where there’s competition from the start and the seed is choked and dies. These are people, “who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” (14)

“I mean we have to take care of business, right?! We can’t be so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good!” They too are distracted by good stuff...and may continue under a cloak of morality...“But when push comes to shove,” the good stuff wins and the seed... the message from God is just NOT the focus.

Finally, some seed (all the seed is the same) some seed falls in good soil – notice the prepositions: some falls “beside/on” the road... “on” the rocky soil...“among” the thorns but this falls “IN” the good soil. (Joel Green, p.325)

And there, IN THE SOIL it does amazing stuff...it’s GOOD SEED and it produces a huge crop a hundred times as great. “These are the ones who have heard the word IN an honest and good heart and hold it firm and bear fruit with endurance.”

And the disciples... are rather agitated...and they demand an answer... Verse 9 reads in Greek “Interrogating Him as to what this parable meant!”

Remember when your teacher said, “This is going to be on the test”? Jesus Christ gives it away!

As tells this plain little story, He gives the answer to the riddle/meaning, VERSE 8, “As He said these things, He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” It’s all about the way we hear.

And THAT seems to be the answer... “the divine pedagogy”: the instructive method of Jesus Christ DEPENDS on Jesus Christ, i.e. you have to come to Him for answers... He teaches so that we will have to ask HIM for the explanation.

If you DO...come to Jesus...if there’s something IN you that recognizes that THIS message...this whole event ...this Person is important...is URGENTLY significant and is ...actually the KEY... AND IF YOU ARE ARRESTED BY THIS WORD so that it gets

INTO you and penetrates and agitates and fascinates... AND if it causes you to GO TO THE SPEAKER... THEN THE SOIL IS GOOD.

See the seed...the word...the message of God is really NOT a plan or program or lifestyle or a LAW or a command or regimen or discipline for YOU TO IMPLEMENT in your life... It's not telling you that "If you DO this – then you will get THAT...do good and get saved, get blessed, get enlightenment" NO.

The seed...the Word...is not a plan...it's a Person. Revelation 19.13 "He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God."

And this Person (who is BOTH the Sower and the Seed), Jesus Christ who is the very Heart of God in human disguise... this Person is God in the flesh...and He is come into TIME/SPACE...to save us from our guilt, to rescue us from the crushing debt of unmet obligations, our failings to love God and love other people.

This Heart of God...the Mind of God made physical in Jesus Christ... the Incarnate Word (John 1.1, 14), the God/Man will live the way I was supposed to live and He will die under the sentence I deserved ... The God who made the stars, galaxies trillions of light years away (unfathomable!!)the God who spoke the universe into being by a WORD... that God, that Word somehow is speaking to them...

And He will live and die and rise from the DEAD FOR THEM... the Word that made all things is THERE... Nothing could be more important!

And what the WORD wants... is YOUR ear... It's really the ONLY thing He wants from YOU... thĒ SINGULAR TAKE-AWAY that could save your life...is to simply receive this message in such a way that it compels you to run to Jesus Christ.

If you get it...if your heart is receptive soil...if God has liberated you from the distractions we all seem to love if God has plowed and prepared the soil of your heart so that YOU see the ultimate importance of this then YOU WILL RUN TO Jesus Christ and ask His help.

If you leave here today thinking, "That was very interesting" or "very boring" or "whatever" ...then YOU ARE LOST...and even what you THINK you have (spiritually) will soon be taken away/evaporate/whither.

But if YOU say... “Lord Jesus Christ, I think I get it but I need YOU to work it out in me... I feel dependent on YOU...I’m counting on YOU... I NEED YOU MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE...” If that’s what’s going on in you, then the mysteries of the Reign of God are granted to YOU. “So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given.” (18)

If this sermon makes you run to Jesus Christ... and leads you to trust in Him...then everything opens up to YOU...and you have started the path of true discipleship... Jesus Christ will own YOU...He will NOT be ashamed of YOU on the great and terrible Day we all want to ignore/deny... He recognizes you as if YOU WERE HIS OWN FAMILY...His own mother and His own siblings.

Amidst all the distractions of life (distractions we want because we don’t want to face ourselves and our hang-ups and the tough stuff of this fallen world) but if YOU SEE THAT THIS PERSON DESERVES ALL THE SUPERLATIVES like “extreme” and “awesome” and “epic” and “ultimate”... IF YOU SEE WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN Jesus Christ, that God is come to live and die and rise for His people...a historical event has happened and if you believe that IT has the power to focus you and liberate you from distractions...a new attentiveness to what really counts.

What does God want from YOU? What is the one thing necessary (Luke 10.42) for real disciples? To hear the Good News so that it penetrates.

But this is just the problem... T.J., I’m distracted... I try to listen... I WANT to hear the right way... but honestly, I’m NOT sure I DO...

Well, if you have a laser-beam focus, like a neurosurgeon’s ability to be IN THE MOMENT and mindful... and a freak photographic memory so you memorize the whole Bible – and you do it all on your own and independent of Jesus... Well, you're lost.

But if you're like most of us... daydreamers and “distracted device dependents” but you regularly run to the actual Person of Jesus Christ – if you will even now (maybe for the first time) come and say, “LORD! I don’t know the meaning of things ...importance of things...I get sidetracked...priorities askew I need You!”

Well, run to Him again and again. Attach yourself to Him. Depend on Him (esp. His doing and dying!) for all the answers/priorities and this Person...this Seed...this Word from another realm will give you ears to hear and make you wildly fruitful both now (in this age of distraction) and in the world to come.