

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

A Parable for Star-Struck Disciples

Luke 7.4-21

February 19, 2017

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."

¹⁹ And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You." ²¹ But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

We're looking at the enormous collection of characters in the four Gospels... and in looking at these people WE are meeting Jesus Christ through their eyes.

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

At this point in this series, we've isolated a theme on the idea of discipleship...how Jesus Christ is shaping His followers by these formative experiences ...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.

And WE want to know what the first disciples of Jesus Christ can teach US about discipleship... What can modern followers and believers expect when they throw in with Him? What does it really mean to be a disciple of Jesus? This section points to ONE indispensable QUALITY...discipleship reduced/simplified ...to the ONE necessity all disciples must have.

The original disciples are looking out on the vast sea of people... and they're a bit star-struck... they're suddenly famous and THIS parable is IN PART to help them see the crowds in a new way... the people 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 VERY MODERN PROBLEM: we are facing a CRISIS OF FOCUS in this age of distraction...and that's why this parable (the seminal parable) can be a great help to US.

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 to pay rent or a mortgage...bills to pay ...appointments to keep... laundry to fold... kids to feed... "Both thorns and thistles the ground shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; 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)

And 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 ain't gonna get done!"

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

I heard a report the other night (network news) about how, despite amazing advances in automobile safety measures (air-bags and sensors and seatbelts), the death rates from driving accidents are steadily rising because everyone is using their devices ...and we are DISTRACTED in our driving.

And it's why we have a whole new vocabulary of "being present", "being in-the-moment", awareness and attentiveness 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" ... "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential"...

An article in the *New York Times* from a few years ago by Andrew O'Hagan called, "The Virtues of Fine in the Age of Awesome"... he writes, "Everything is "awesome," "mega," "massive" and "total..."

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"

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 is making us distracted – it's that WE WANT TO BE DISTRACTED.

It's a spiritual thing... like the comedian Louie C.K. 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 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 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 next to 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 message but are in league with the devil... and Jesus has in mind, the religious people who thought that His words were worthless... They're not devil worshipers, just people SO DISTRACTED.

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": an emotional response but NO depth...and when something ELSE presents itself, they are 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 religiosity..."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 on good soil – notice the prepositions: some falls "beside" the road... "on" the rocky soil... "among" the thorns but this falls "IN" the good soil.

And there 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 as Jesus Christ tells this little plain story, He gives the answer to the riddle, 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 the disciples... are rather agitated...and they demand an answer...Verse 9 reads in Greek "Interrogating Him as to what this parable meant!"

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...Jesus Christ who is the very Heart of God in human disguise... this Person is God in the flesh...and He has come into TIME/SPACE...to save us from our guilt ...to rescue us from the crushing debt of our responsibility, 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, the galaxies trillions of light years away (unfathomable!!)... the God who spoke the universe into being by a WORD... that God somehow is speaking to them... and will live and die and rise from the DEAD FOR THEM... the Word that made all things is THERE...

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 (like a junky loves to shoot poison in his arm) 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...

You'll find yourself depending on Him... 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 am 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 REALLY DOES DESERVE 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 for real disciples?

What does it mean to have a heart that's good and honest? What is the path to a life that is spiritually rich and productive?

What does God want from YOU?

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

God wants you to receive grace from Him... God wants your ear.