

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Mark 4: “13 And [Jesus] said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. 16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. 18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

“Sublimity & Majesty: The Book of Ephesians”

This morning we begin our journey through the Book of Ephesians. It is a book that we use liberally in our worship services as readings and guidance for our Covenant Renewal Worship liturgy. It is a book that will take us to the highest views of God’s grand plan of salvation and yet bring some of the most practical advice for our lives! As is our general practice here at Church of the King we will approach this important book exegetically which is a fancy word that means we will go verse by verse! As we do this, we will of course strive to see how Ephesians is informed by other passages of Scripture and/or helps us understand some other passages in new ways.

- **Such will be the case this morning with the parable of the Sower which is why it was included as part of our text that was read.**

I need to say right up front that much, if not most, of the credit for the insights that I will share from this book will come from the work that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones presented in a series of sermons many years ago.

- **As I have often said, when someone else says things well, we should not try to reinvent the wheel just to have something new to say.**

Now having said that, when I read about the fear and trepidation with which Pastor Lloyd-Jones approached his series, I thought perhaps I needed to pick another book because I was not up to the task... Of course reading through this book, as I trust you all did, how could a pastor not look pretty good with all this great material! At bottom, I trust this series will be edifying and helpful and so let us dig in...

Most would agree that the Apostle presents the general theme of this Epistle in the very first few verses: “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

- **In my sermon title for this morning, I am concurring with Pastor Lloyd -Jones who argues this epistle is the most sublime and majestic of Paul’s writings.**

He writes that in the first chapter we are to focus on, “God, the eternal and everlasting God, self-sufficient in Himself, from eternity to eternity, needing the aid of no-one, living, dwelling in His own everlasting, absolute and eternal glory.” That is the great theme of this epistle and we must not start by examining ourselves and our needs, but rather we must start with God and forget ourselves. He adds, “In this Epistle we are taken as it were by the hand by the Apostle and are told that we are going to be given a view of the glory and the majesty of God!”

We will then see the glories of God’s grace by which we are saved and some powerful teaching about the Church, the Body of Christ! Even as we move on into the final chapters and our practical applications it will still be God who is at the center when we are reminded that our marriages reflect Christ’s love for the Church and that bosses should rule as their own Master in heaven does.

- And of course, we need the full Armor of God for all of life’s battles!
- So why did I include the summary of the Parable of the Sower and what does it have to do with our study of the Book of Ephesians?

We are going to spend the next few weeks reviewing just the first few verses of this Epistle and we will begin with verse one: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:”

When we study these early verses we will consider some very basic questions:

What is Paul? An Apostle of Jesus Christ!

Why is Paul an Apostle? By the Will of God!

What is an Apostle? It is one who is sent out!

To Whom is he sent? To the Saints!

And why was he sent? To bring grace and peace from God!

How does he do this? By giving them the Truth!

This relates very well to the series we have chosen to study on Thursday nights called Project Truth! In the first lesson the host stressed how Jesus said He came to witness to the truth and of course we know that He is the Way the Truth and the Life and that He has sent us the Spirit of Truth, by which the Apostle Paul was able to write the Epistle to the Ephesians. AND we know that God’s Word is truth: Truth that Proverbs teaches us should be sought after more than gold or silver.

Well, Jesus said if we do not understand the parable of the sower, how will we understand any of the other parables, and I believe He said this because truth and how we handle truth is of vital importance.

- What we are going to be learning in Ephesians is TRUTH.

What is presented is not the Apostle Paul’s opinion, it is not Pastor Lloyd-Jones’ opinion and it is certainly not MY opinion, but it is truth given to us by revelation from God Himself. It is the seed, the Word, that is presented in the parable of the sower. The question to ponder is what happens to the seed that is sown? This is important for us to see in our own lives AND it helps us understand what we often see in the lives of others.

Pastor Lloyd-Jones understood this well and it is interesting to see his perspective on the problems of the 1950’s which were clearly the seeds of our problems today: He writes, “The Bible is God’s book, it is a revelation of God, and our thinking must always start with God. Much of the trouble in the Church today [written again in the 1950’s] is due to the fact that we are so subjective, so interested in ourselves, so egocentric. That is the peculiar error of this present century.

Having forgotten God, and having become so interested in ourselves, we become miserable and wretched, and spend our time in ‘shallows and in miseries’. The message of the Bible from the beginning to the end is designed to bring us back to God, to humble us before God, and to enable us to see our true relationship to Him. That is the great theme of this Epistle, it holds us face to face with God and what God is and what God has done, it emphasizes throughout the glory and the greatness of God – God the Eternal One, God the everlasting, God over all- and the indescribable glory of God!”

So, in explaining this central parable, Jesus plainly states that the sower sows the Word.

- Again, that Word is Truth from God and we know that God uses means to share that truth.

God used the Gospel writers to record this very parable, many commentators and preaches have expounded on this truth and many Saints have shared the truth, and thus the seed is sown. Jesus then tells us that there are four different places those seeds fall and we should think of a typical field. *[explain]*

This of course shows us what the impact in our lives will be depending on how we handle the truth given in this series from Ephesians...

15 “And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

This is a graphic picture of what the Bible calls a hardened heart!

- This is certainly NOT how we want to approach God’s Word in our lives and why we pray that God would give new hearts to those with stony hearts as we share His truth with them.

Next, we come to two places where the seed can fall that we see far too often in our modern world and need to guard against in our own lives and the lives of our covenant children.

- Someone can be very excited about what is shared in my messages on Ephesians, but in the end not benefit in any real way if they do not guard their own hearts!

16 “These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble.”

As we move through these first two chapters of Ephesians we are going to learn that our salvation is all of God, by grace through faith. It is not our faith, anymore than one of those seeds can prosper without good soil to draw upon. The seed will sprout and even grow a bit in a pile of rocks but it will soon wither and die.

- Sadly, that is what happens if we make a profession in our own strength and then encounter the trials and tribulation of this world.
- As we will learn in the final chapter of Ephesians, we need God’s armor to survive!

Next, we have those seeds that fall in some soil near the edge of the field...

18 “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Here we have folks who can hear God’s truth, all the good stuff we will learn in the Book of Ephesians...

- But, they think that they can put it right in there with everything else they have learned on their own or from the world.

We may think that we are putting God’s truth first, but just as those weeds do in the field, the word will eventually be crowded out. Mr. Tolkien gave us a graphic picture of this with his character Gollum.

- And finally, we come to the field where we want to be!

20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

This is clearly where Paul wants to take us in this high and majestic Epistle and we will study it at length when we come to chapter two where the Apostle writes these very familiar words: Ephesians 2: “8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

And Paul will give us plenty of practical help in understanding what some of those good works are to be in our lives, but for this morning I want us to ponder that parable... We cannot have a relationship with God, no less do any good works if we reject the Word as the hardpan of that road did those seeds... Satan is always ready and willing to take it away!

And if we think we can put stuff off until later we should remember that sobering warning we read in Proverbs this month about not heeding Wisdom’s call: Proverbs 1: “Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, 25 Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, 27 When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. 28 “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. 29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord, 30 They would have none of my counsel & despised my every rebuke.”

Next, we will be unable to do those good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in if we run off doing things on our own. Those seeds on the rock sprouted, but they had no root in the soil and when troubles came their own strength was not sufficient.

The same is true with those planted among the weeds and thorns... You cannot go about your worldly life Monday through Saturday and then come to church on Sunday because that is what Christians do... Yes, you may hear many of the truths that are shared from Ephesians and even get excited about some of them, but in the end Jesus says the cares of this world will choke the Word.

- **This is why the Apostle Paul tells us that the Old Testament Saints were given as our examples... Often as what we should avoid!**

So my hope and prayer is that we all will be that good soil where the Seed, the Word of Truth, can be planted and grow and produce a bountiful harvest! If you have not already read through this Epistle to the Saints at Ephesus, please try to do so in the next two weeks: Keeping in mind this bit of wisdom from Pastor Lloyd-Jones:

“We must not start with ourselves and then ascend to God; We must start with the sovereignty of God, God over all, and then come down to ourselves.”

- **And then let us come together ready to learn those things that the Spirit would teach us so we can walk in the good works that we are intended to enjoy!**

Communion Meditation: Proverb 9

**“Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars;
2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city, 4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 “Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.”**

