

Cultural Authority

Salvation

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Bible Text: Matthew 13:1-9

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In the mid 1800s a man by the name of Frederick Nietzsche startled the world with a statement that rings down through history to our day, “God is dead.” That shook the world then and it shakes the world even now. The Church at that time had even presently geared up to counter that comment by Nietzsche to show how it was not true, to show the fallacy of it. The Atheists and the Agnostics applauded him and thanked him for finally saying what they had thought and said for many years.

Many people are familiar with that phrase. Very few people are familiar with the philosophy that spawned that statement. The philosophy that Nietzsche taught was summarized in one sentence by him.

“The things that you think you know, you don’t know.”

You think you know there is a God, but there isn’t. You think you have experienced God, you haven’t. You think that God is the creator and sustainer of all things. He isn’t.

“The things that you think you know, you don’t know.”

And that was the underlying philosophy of Nietzsche that led him to make that startling statement that startles us even today, “God is dead.”

Fewer people yet don’t realize that that philosophy of Nietzsche is the rallying cry of Post-Modernism and influences and infects the growth of the Church in our day. The seeker friendly church, the mega church movement, the Emergent church all have a foundation that is built upon that philosophy of Nietzsche.

“The things that you think you know, you don’t know.”

The surprising thing even more so yet is that Jesus Christ refuted and contradicted that philosophy centuries before Nietzsche even took his first breath. It happened on a sabbath day in Capernaum, a city located on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum had become the Lord Jesus’ new headquarters. As you know, he was from Nazareth. Nazareth rejected him. They refused his ministry and the Scriptures tell us

that Jesus could not do many might miracles there because of their unbelief. And so he left Nazareth and he went to Capernaum just a few miles north.

And he had visited Capernaum many times and he had many journeys throughout Galilee ministering to the people there. This particular sabbath morning he went into the synagogue. The synagogue was built specifically for teaching. It was not the temple. The temple was in Jerusalem, but they had synagogues scattered throughout the land where they would come together and they would be instructed in God's Word to teach you to read and instruct the people there on the Word of God.

This particular morning the Lord Jesus read from the Scriptures and he taught and in the audience sat a man with a withered arm. And Jesus challenged the audience there. He said, "Is it right to do good on the sabbath or evil?"

And they looked at him in stone silence. The Lord Jesus, a little bit angered at their lack of compassion for their fellow man, spoke to the man and said, "Reach forth your hand." And the man reached forth his hand and it was healed.

Well, in the crowd there were Pharisees and other religious rulers who took offense at what Jesus had done to the man. They had their strict sabbath rules as to what you could and could not do on a sabbath day. And in their mind you could not heal on a sabbath day. And it says that they took counsel together how they might destroy him.

The Lord Jesus left the synagogue and went out. And as he left he synagogue and went out, he encountered a crowd of people, thousands of people had come following the Messiah, listening to him, eager to hear, eager to have them touch him and for him then to touch him that they might be healed and cured of their diseases.

They came from Tyre, a city about 50 miles north of Capernaum. They came from as far away in the south as Idumea. That is not a very well known spot, but that is in southern Judah over 100 miles away. They came from what nations now we would call Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan. And they flocked to see and to hear Jesus.

We don't know the number of people that were there, but it is numbered into the thousands. In fact, the crowd was so huge that the Lord Jesus got into a boat. He had made preparations for just such an occasion and he had a boat reserved there on the sea shore. And he got into the boat and he spoke to the crowd on the boat.

There is a little plain right there just outside of Capernaum, so there was plenty of room for the thousands of people who had come. And just beyond, outside of the crowd the Lord Jesus had a view of all of the fields that surrounded the city of Capernaum. He could see the lush fields of corn as they grew. He could see the pathways that went in between the crowds, the walkways that people traveled. He could see within the different crops, he could see the thorns, the clumps of thorns that had scattered and spotted throughout the crowds. He could see the birds that came and took away the seed on the well worn paths.

That was the view of the Lord Jesus on this sabbath day.

We find recorded in Scripture what Jesus taught on that day and what he taught on that day refutes, contradicts the philosophy of Nietzsche that says, “The things you think you know, you don’t.”

Matthew chapter 13 we have recorded for us seven parables that the Lord Jesus taught on that day, on that seashore scene. Of the seven parables that he taught, four of them have to do with crops. He could see them. The crowd was familiar with them. It was an every day kind of topic that he could use to illustrate spiritual truth.

Some have called it revelation by illustration, the use of parables, the telling of a story, a simple story, something from their every day life that they knew and understood. But the Lord Jesus used it to teach and to reveal to them, spiritual truth.

We read in Matthew chapter 13 the record of those seven parables. We won’t take time to look at all of them today. We will look just at the first one which is the parable of the sower, a very kind scene in Israel of that day. Jesus used it to illustrate the message of the kingdom, the gospel of the kingdom, for that was the topic of all seven of those parables was the kingdom of God. And he used the parable of the sower to introduce the topic of the kingdom.

I will just read a few verses from Matthew 13. You can follow along as I read if you choose in Matthew chapter 13 starting in verse number one.

It says:

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.¹

To fully understand the emphasis and the theme of this parable we need to look at its parts and get a grasp of those parts and understand the parts. And once we get a glimpse and a grasp of the individual parts of the parable, we can then better understand the theme

¹ Matthew 13:1-9.

of the parable and the message that the Lord Jesus wanted his listeners to hear and to see and to understand.

This particular parable the Lord Jesus himself interpreted. He explained it. So we have a good grasp of what this parable should mean and should understand in our minds.

We see his interpretation beginning in verse number 18. We will read that quickly and then take a look at the parts.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.²

We will start with the sower, a very vivid picture to the people of those days. That is how they planted their crops. A sower would go forth to sow. He would leave the city and go outside of the city to where the land was more open where he could plant his seed and, thus, a crop. He carried a bag over his shoulder. The seed was in the bag and he would reach his hand down into the bag and he would scatter them out as he walked and traversed over the land that he wanted to plant. That is the picture of the sower.

The sower very vividly pictures the Lord Jesus. That is exactly what he did. The Lord Jesus traveled throughout all of the cities of Samaria and into Judah and he traveled back and forth and he scattered the seed. He fulfills the picture of the sower.

We, like Jesus, scatter seed as well. We are like him, a sower. He is the master sower. We emulate him and we scatter the seed as well as he did. But that is the picture of the sower.

Next we come to the seed. Scriptures tell us that the seed is the Word of God. This particular parable we find in the first three gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—and when we examine the other references in Mark and Luke we discover what we don't see here in Matthew that that is what the seed was. The seed was the Word of God. The seed was the message of the kingdom.

² Matthew 13:18-23.

And we find that the Lord Jesus spoke very clearly at the beginning of his ministry recorded in Mark chapter one verse number 15 that the Lord Jesus went out and he began to preach in the cities and in the byways and it said he preached the gospel of the kingdom.

And here is what he said, “Repent and believe for the kingdom is come.”

So the Lord Jesus, as he went out and scattered the seed, the seed that he scattered was the message of the kingdom of God, the gospel, the good news, the Word of God that pronounced and identified the Lord Jesus as God the Father’s provision for sinners like you and like me. The message included God’s provision of the Lord Jesus and his declaring that he was God’s Son in which he stated, “I have come to become the Savior. Whoever believes in me shall never die, but shall inherit eternal life.”

That is the message that the Lord Jesus proclaimed. He scattered the seed.

Now we come to the crops and this is a little more interesting aspect of the parable. The first crop that we encounter is the one by the wayside. In that day there were paths that meandered through the crops and that was the way that the people traveled from location to location and their beasts traveled with them. And the ground became very hard because it was trodden under foot repeatedly by people and by their animals. And they interspersed in between the various crops so that as the sower would scatter his seed, some of it would fall by that wayside, would fall on that hardened path. And that path was so hard and the soil so compacted that the seed didn’t have any chance at all to ever penetrate that soil. And, in fact, it tells us that the birds of the air came and would feed off of those seeds that fell on the wayside, never had a chance to penetrate down into the soil.

And the Lord Jesus used that to picture and to identify for us those people who have hardened hearts. The Word of God does not penetrate. The Word of God does not sink in to their minds and into their hearts, their soul and their spirit. And, in fact, the devil comes quickly, the Scriptures say. The devil comes quickly and grabs away the seed of the Word of God before it even has a chance to take root.

The pathway identifies for us those people who reject the Word of God, refuse to hear, refuse to listen. They have hardened hearts just like the hardened soil and the devil comes and takes away the seed of the Word of God so they cannot believe. That is the first soil.

The second soil is the stony places. Israel is known for its stony ground.

I remember many years ago my wife’s uncle took a trip to the holy land and when he came back his favorite phrase was, “Rocks, rocks, rocks, everywhere you look, rocks. Stones all over the place. That is all you see is stones, stones, stones, rocks, rocks, rocks.”

Well, that is true. The ground was a very stony, rocky ground. This pictures for us those places in the crops where when the seed was scattered it would hit some of the soil that perhaps laid on the top surface of the stony places and the rocky places. And underneath that very thin layer of soil there was rocks and stones and the seed would fall on that very thin layer of soil and would take a little bit of root and would spring up a plant, but as it tried to grow a root base, it encountered the rocks and the stones. It died. It wouldn't grow. It had no root. It needs more than just the top part of the plant. It needs the root that goes down into the ground and gets the moisture and the nutrients out of the soil. And because of the rocks and the stones beneath the surface layer, those seeds never grew.

And the Lord Jesus points out to us there are people just like that. People's lives and hearts are just like those stony places. The seed comes, takes a little bit of root. The people are excited about it at the very beginning and they have, with great joy they accept the Word. Oh, but then trial and difficulty comes. The sun starts to shine and the sun is hot and it blazes and it kills the plant because there is no root. And that pictures for us those people whose lives encounter difficulty, hardship, trial, persecution. And when it comes, it scorches the plant and kills it because there is no root.

But there is a third kind of soil and that soil is the thorns. The thorns grow in strange places in the land of Israel. Sometimes there are big clumps of thorns scattered throughout the plot that the sower wanted to sow. On other occasions there were plots of the thorns that would be in the corners so it is a little difficult to get it all cleared out. So sometimes then the thorns grew in the corners and sometimes even scattered throughout the good soil. And as the sower would scatter his seed, some of the seed would fall in those areas where thorns grew.

And the thorns would grow up and mature and as they grew, they would choke out any seed that had any beginnings of life and would even prevent seed from reaching the soil. Thorns would choke it out.

The Lord Jesus uses this soil example to identify for us those people who have thorns in their lives, the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches. Oh, are they deceitful. They trick us. They draw us in, promising much but causing such great harm. And then there is the cares of this world. And then we read in one of the other gospels where it talks about covetousness, the lust of things, the thorns of life. They choke out the Word of God, prevent it from taking root and becoming fruitful in our lives

And there was a fourth soil. This was the good soil. This was the good land. It has been prepared and when the sower scattered the seed into the good soil it says it grew up and it matured and it brought forth fruit, abundant fruit. Some of the seeds brought forth 30 fold, some 60 fold, some 100 fold, a fruitful crop from the good soil.

And the Lord Jesus wanted us to see that there were people like that whose hearts and minds received the Word of God, the message of God, the message of the gospel, the

gospel of the kingdom. And they believed. And Jesus called them to believe and they trust Jesus.

He said, “Trust me. Believe upon me and you shall inherit eternal life.”

And the good soil represents those people who receive him, trust him, believe him. And they bring forth fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100.

Notice the mark of the Christ follower. There is fruit. Yes, we can identify those among us who profess their allegiance to Christ but do so falsely because they don't bring forth fruit. The true follower of Christ brings forth fruit. There is variety as to how much we bring, but we all bring forth fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100.

As we think back over this parable and some of the parts of it, I want to bring us back to the fallacy of Nietzsche who said, “The things that you think you know, you don't know,” and to show you how the Lord Jesus contradicts and refutes that false fallacy.

We read here about the sower. We understand the sower. That is the Lord Jesus. As we think of the overall plan of redemption of God and redemptive history, we see that it does have parts to it. There was the creation of God. There was the fall of man. There is redemption. There is consummation.

The Lord Jesus ministers now in the era that we would call redemption, that part of redemptive history in which God fulfilled his promise that he made centuries prior to Adam and Eve in the garden and to prophets down through history in which he foretold that there will come a prophet, there will come a Savior. There will come one I will send. Believe him to have life.

The Lord Jesus came in fulfillment of all of those promises and we now live in that era, that part of redemptive history during which the Father in his grace and in his mercy is scattering the seed. He is permitting us and others to scatter the seed to others. Some of us have received that seed. Some of us have rejected that seed. But we live in this time when the Lord is scattering seed.

There will come a day and he promised when that works no more.

[?] Time will be no more. There will be no more scattering of the seed. There will be no more planting. There will be a time of harvest.

We have seen that the seed pictures for us the Word of God. The fallacy of the Post Modern movement, the Emergent church, the mega church movement, the seeker friendly church movement, the fallacy that they take from Nietzsche's philosophy is this. There is no absolute truth. We need many seeds. One seed isn't true. There has got to be many seeds. There are many truths. You have your truth. You have your truth. You have your truth. This person over here has their truth. This person over here has their truth. Everyone's truth is a people value. There is no distinction between truths. It all depends

on how you grew up. It all depends upon the society in which you live and the way in which you form truth and what you believe. They all exist together.

That is not what the parable tells us. In the parable there was one seed, one message, one gospel of the kingdom, not many. There was one Savior, one Lord Jesus and the parable reminds us and provides for us by way of a picture the refutation by Jesus of the false philosophy of Nietzsche so prevalent in our day today even within the professing Church.

There is absolute truth. The Lord Jesus presents it.

There is a second aspect I want us to see from this parable, prevalent in our day that the Lord Jesus used to refute a further extension of the philosophy of Nietzsche and that is this. Notice that the failure to generate a successful crop was not the fault of the seed. It was the fault of the soil.

There were varieties of soils, yes. One seed, but the problem was the soil. The seed did not grow within the soil typified by the wayside, the pathway, not because of a failure in the seed, but because of the nature of the soil. Likewise, when we come to the stony ground the seed did not fail to reach maturity and to have roots down into the soil because of the failure of the seed. It was a failure of the soil. When we come to the third soil that failed, that with the thorns, again, the seed did not fail to mature and to arrive at fruitfulness because of an inherent failure in the seed, but because of the failure of the soil.

And we have seen by the explanation of the Lord Jesus himself that the soils provide for us a picture of people. And as a picture of people and their response to the to the message, the seed, the gospel of Christ, the response of people is to reject it. The response of people is an occasion, oh, this is exciting. This is wonderful. And they believe it for a short time, and then when trial and difficulty.

And then there are those for whom the cares of this world choke out the message of the gospel.

The failure was not in the seed, but the soil. Granted, we have a variety of peoples. There is a variety of societies. But there is only one seed.

The world would want us to adapt the seed to the soil. Change the message. Change it for this society. Change it for this society and what you proclaim to this society over here on the East doesn't fit the society on the North, so we need a different message for them. The people of the South differ from the East and the West and they need their own message. They need their own truth.

No, my friends. There is one message, one Savior, the Lord Jesus. And the failure is not in the message, but on those who hear the message and either on one hand refuse it, or on the other receive it.

Notice a third thing about this parable and that is this. Where the seed grew always produced fruit, always, always, always.

The mark of a child of God, a member of the kingdom is that he will have fruit. There will be a measurable change in the lives of those who trust Christ. They will grow into righteousness, some 30, some 60, some 100. But they will all grow. There will be a change.

Nietzsche declared a fallacy and many in our day have fallen for it. It has extensive roots within our society and societies around the world. It has infected and impacted the professing Church of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus gave a warning at the end of his parable. We read it in verse number nine. He said to those who listened, many of them representing his experiences and his preaching ministries, he encountered some by the wayside. He encountered some who were like the stony, rocky soil. He encountered some that were like the thorns. And he said to that crowd, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."³

Listen to the message, he said. Listen to what I am saying. Understand the message that I proclaim to you about salvation through me, the Father's provision for sinners like you and like me. Trust me. Believe me.

In essence, his cry was, "Break up the fallow ground," that is ground by the wayside that has grown hard. Break it up.

Those of you who would represent the stony ground, remove the stones. Dig up the stones. Remove them. Those of you who would represent the land with the thorns and the thistles, remove them. Turn them out that the seed might take root and grow and become fruitful.

I pray that the Spirit of God will take these truths so simply expressed in this parable by the Lord Jesus that is modern and up to date in application as our day today and that he will use it to encourage you, to edify you, to convict you, to correct you, to conform you to the message of the gospel that in believing that message you might find life eternal.

Let's close in prayer.

Thank you, Father, that in your sovereign grace and mercy you have preserved for us this teaching of the Lord Jesus on that sabbath day centuries ago in Capernaum, the simple story of the sower who went forth to sow and how current and how applicable it is to our day and to our lives. I ask you, Father, to send forth your Holy Spirit to fulfill those things that the Lord Jesus promised he would do when you sent him to teach us, to guide us into the truth, to open our eyes to see and to understand your Word and that seeing we might believe and that those of us who need to break up the fallow ground will break it up, those of us who need to remove the stony places that the seed might take root that we

³ Matthew 13:9.

will remove the stones and that those of us whose lives are choked by the thorns and the cares and pleasures of this world, may we set them aside and permit your seed, the gospel, the life saving truth of faith in Jesus Christ may it grow in our hearts and bring forth fruit to the honor and glory of your name I pray. Amen.