



# Scattered in our Hearts

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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What's the Kingdom of God like? How do things work in the kingdom of God? How do people get in? How do they stay in? How does the kingdom grow? How does it decline? How does it spread? What's it like? How does it operate? The Kingdom of God is really a place of relationship. A place of communication. Therefore, *a Kingdom of WORDS*. Words are really important to the Kingdom of God. Why? Because relationship is what the Kingdom of God is all about. And so, communication and words mean everything in the Kingdom of God. It's how the Kingdom is run. How it operates. How things happen.

And this is how God's Word works in His Kingdom. It's like farming. Like a farmer going out to plant seed, cast seed - that's how they did it back then. Indiscriminate casting. Casting it everywhere. When you cast out seed, what happens to it? Some falls on the path. Some falls on rocky soil. Some falls among thorns. Some falls on good soil.

That's how the Word about Jesus works in God's Kingdom. It's cast out into human hearts. Some Word seed produces a bumper crop of faith and good works. Some fails to survive and produce faith; no trust, no good works, no true worship. And the problem is never with the seed, never God's Word. God's Word is always good seed.

What happens as God's WORD, Jesus (Jn 1), is cast out. Where's it supposed to go? Where does it land? It lands on human hearts. It lands in *your* heart. What happens as God's WORD is cast out into your heart? Sometimes, like the seed cast on the path, the evil one comes along and snatches it away and nothing comes of it. No faith even begins to grow in our heart. "... so they might not believe, and be saved." (Lk 8)

The Word that's sown in our heart is immediately snatched up. How? Satan whispers in our ear, "Sounds good, but is it true? Isn't it just a fairytale - nice stories, but none of it ever *really* happened? Come on, no one *really* believes this stuff anymore! It's so outdated. So old fashion. It doesn't have anything to do with our modern world. After all, the Bible is just a bunch of stories made up by man. It's not really the word of God. How silly! It's just man's way of trying to control other people. The 'opiate of the masses', as Karl Marx put it. Science, has long since disproved most of what the Bible says." And *poof*, the seeds of faith that were cast into our hearts are suddenly taken away and disappear into thin air!

Other seed falls on ROCKY ground. God's WORD (Jesus - Lk 24:27) is cast out into our hearts. Why? In order to bring Good News for sinners - *hope, acceptance by God, eternal life, joy* - in order to bring us into relationship with God, in order to create and grow a faith relationship, in order to bring us back to Him, that we would once again trust Him and rest in Him. Rejoice in Him. Love Him.

To hear what God has done with our sin, taking it upon Himself and taking it away from us, reconciling us to Himself - we sense His presence in a very new and personal way! To begin to be drawn into relationship with Him. There's nothing like it in the world. How exciting! God's Word begins to grow faith in our hearts. Faith in Jesus!

But it's short-lived. It doesn't last. The problem? Not everyone cares to hear this Good News. God's Word about Jesus for sinners is opposed by many. They don't want to hear that they're sinners, judged by God, found guilty, sentenced to an eternity in hell. They don't want to hear the truth. They don't want to hear that they need a Savior; someone to save them, as if they needed saving from anyone, especially God. Nobody's going to tell them what to do or what to believe. And anyone who tells them different, them's fight'n words!

*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.*

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith ... (Colossians 2:6-7) Otherwise, your faith won't hold up under the pressure. Such excitement to begin with! But for what? Our desire to be liked by others and avoid persecution is stronger than our desire for God.*

How about your faith in the Lord Jesus? Is it rooted? Are you rooted in God's Word, so that when persecution comes your way, you won't fall, but stand up and endure? Continue trusting God, no matter what? Trusting your life in Jesus' hands.

Other seed falls on THORNS. *As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches (and pleasures of life – Lk 8) choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (and their fruit does not mature - Lk 8)*

What a day! If it's not one thing, it's another. How am I ever going to get everything done! My doctor says I need to quit worrying and exercise more and sleep more, but who has time for that? I was so excited to finally buy that new car, that new 200 inch screen TV, the latest iPhone, that new bike, that new outfit. How come I'm no happier than I was before? Anxieties such as what will we eat, what will we wear. Houses, work, investments, retirement. So many options, so many important things to tend to, so many ways to amuse ourselves. Play and work ahead of worship.

What happens when God's Good News about Jesus is cast into our hearts? Like the seed that falls among the thorns, we hear it, we hear God speaking to us, tugging at our hearts, but how many *other* voices, others things, seem to crowd it out, push it aside, silence His voice? "... *but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and pleasures of life choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.* For most of us, this one hits close to home, doesn't it?

And we're deceived. What we *thought* would bring such wondrous fruit in our lives, riches and pleasures, tricked us. They deceived us into thinking *that* was the way to go. But it wasn't. Left to grow unchecked in our hearts, instead of bring forth life, they bring forth death. What's choking off God's Word in your heart? What riches and pleasures are deceiving you? What's taking over your heart and crowding out God and His Word and Jesus?

What happens when God's Word is cast into our hearts? The evil one snatches it away ... *so they might not believe, and be saved.*" (Lk 8) Or we receive it with joy. But we're not rooted in it and in time of testing we fall away. Or the many cares of this world, along with its riches and pleasures, deceive us and choke off the Word that's been planted in our hearts and our faith slowly withers away.

Yet the Word of God is not yet finished. More good seed is cast. *As for what was sown on GOOD SOIL, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.*" The Word of God, the Good News of Jesus for sinners is cast out into hearts, and it takes hold and it grows and it matures and it bears fruit. Fruit that lasts.

The Kingdom of God is a place of relationship. A Kingdom of WORDS. Words cast out into our hearts. Why? In order to convict of sin, humble our proud hearts, and deliver a message of Good News. In order to bring us into relationship with God. In order to create and grow a faith relationship. In order to bring us back to Him, that we would once again trust Him and live.

The following is from the latest edition of the Lutheran Brethren publication *Faith & Fellowship*: The sun was just setting on our confirmation retreat as four local pastors swapped stories about life as a parish pastor. From the stories, one could conclude that the church as a whole is facing challenging times: downright depressing attendance trends, young adults leaving the church and not returning to church once they have children, an ever-growing secularization of society, and the sad list goes on.

I myself shared my honest frustration with responding to parishioners who were slipping away from a vital connection to the body of Christ—those who at one time had attended weekly and were involved in various ministries, but now are seen only a handful of times a year, or not at all.

But the seed of God's Word is not cast into our hearts only once. The article continues: ... we had all had experienced bumping into these MIA (missing in action) parishioners in our communities. What's the best approach to help invigorate their faith and connection to the body of Christ? When we see them at the grocery store, do we try to win them over with niceness? ... At the sporting event, do we invite them to a new program that the church is offering? It's hard to know what to do. We laughed at the witty remark of one pastor: "Yeah, we don't have many tools left beyond guilt, shame, and doughnuts."

The lie ... is that it's the responsibility of the local church to come up with bigger and better programs, productions or personalities to keep believers engaged. A strong focus on designing ministries to attract and retain consumer Christians is exhausting to pastors and parishioners, requiring loads of bucks and mega hours to maintain.

Recently, the Spirit broke through my thick head to try a different approach with a young guy named Mackenzie. ... I sent him an invitation via text, "... I'd like to meet with you to do a Bible study together. How's that for cutting edge ministry?

Two guys, sitting at a table reading through 1 Peter verse by verse. Radical stuff. After 45 minutes in the Bible, Mackenzie was open to meeting again the following week. I didn't even have to bribe him with doughnuts! God amazed me once again in how he works through his Word. Rather than trying to convince Mackenzie of the benefits of returning to church, I watched God work through the first chapter of 1 Peter. (Dean Rostad, *Faith & Fellowship* July/August 2017)

Guilt, shame, and doughnuts: tools yielding temporary results. God's Word: eternal, life-giving results. *As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*

The seed of God's Word is not cast into our hearts only once, but continually. And we never know when it might take root and grow and mature and produce a bumper crop for all eternity! As the commentator Lenski put it,

What the parable and its exposition describe is the *final* fate of the Word in the hearts of men. When life is done, some show a harvest, grains running from 30 to 100; all the rest show none. Some never let the Word in, some never let it root, some smothered its growth. But this *final* fate of the Word is shown us *now*, so that we may examine ourselves as to how we are treating the Word *now*, before life is done. (pg. 523)

What happens when we cast out the seed of God's Word about Jesus for sinners? Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther found out. Lives are changed, saved. The world is changed. And he takes zero credit for it. It was all the Word. Luther writes, "We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure. ... I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. ... I did nothing; the Word did everything." (LW 51:77)

Living things need what? They need to eat. They need to be fed, constantly. What about living faith? Doesn't it need constant feeding as well? Back to God's Word. That's really what the Protestant Reformation was all about. Back to the Word of God. The Kingdom of God is really a place of relationship. Therefore, it's a Kingdom of WORDS, a Kingdom of the WORD, Jesus Christ, scattering the seeds of faith and trust into our hearts, that we might believe and be saved.

*"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."* (Isaiah 55:9-11)