

Theme: How do you receive the Word of God?

- 1) Do you let the devil snatch it from your ear?
- 2) Do you let trouble scorch it from your heart?
- 3) Do you let the world choke it from your soul?
- 4) Or does it take root in you and produce abundant fruit?

That same day Jesus left the house and was sitting by the sea. ²A large crowd gathered around him. So he stepped into a boat and sat down, while all the people stood on the shore. ³He told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen, a sower went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. ⁶But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it. ⁸But some seed fell on good ground and produced grain: some one hundred times, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁸“So listen carefully to the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path. ²⁰The seed that was sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he is not deeply rooted and does not endure. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. ²²The seed that was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it produces no fruit. ²³But the seed that was sown on the good ground is the one who continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown.”

Do you understand the Gospel we confess at Divine Word? It reveals our most loving God, who not only desires everyone's salvation but also shows the lengths He went through to save us. Our gracious LORD has paid for the sins of all through His death on the cross. He offers forgiveness to everyone, regardless of who they are or what they have done!

God's Gospel is a wonderful comfort for every sin-scorched soul. It bids us to confess all our sins and guilt to God and believe that He forgives us. Through faith in Jesus, God counts us holy and heirs of eternal life with Him in paradise. Who wouldn't want all that the Gospel freely promises and gives?

Sadly, many reject this Gospel or treat it with indifference. Why? Not because there is anything wrong with the Gospel; there is something wrong with how people receive it.

Therefore, let us all ask ourselves the question: **How do I receive the Word of God?** 1) Do I let the devil snatch it from my ear? 2) Do I let trouble scorch it from my heart? 3) Do I let the world choke it from my soul? 4) Or does it take root in me and produce abundant fruit?

Part One: Do you let the devil snatch it from your ear?

Our text begins: *That same day Jesus left the house and was sitting by the sea. ²A large crowd gathered around him. So he stepped into a boat and sat down, while all the people stood on the shore. ³He told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen, a sower went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. ⁶But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it*

withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it. ⁸But some seed fell on good ground and produced grain: some one hundred times, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear... ¹⁸So listen carefully to the parable of the sower..."

Yes, listen carefully because Jesus' whole parable is about how people receive God's Word. Some hear but don't really listen. Others listen, but only for a little while. Still others listen, but do not give their undivided attention to what God is telling them. And then there are those who, by God's grace, listen with intent, growing in faith and love towards God.ⁱ

Jesus is the sower in the parable, and His Gospel is the seed He sows.

Without seed, ground is lifeless. The same is true regarding our hearts without the Gospel. Therefore, just as God placed life in every seed to produce life on the ground, so God has placed His Spirit in His Word to produce spiritual life in the human heart. The Gospel is always living and active – never lacking the power to produce faith.ⁱⁱ But when it doesn't produce faith? The weakness is not in the Gospel seed but in the soil of our hearts that is hostile towards it.

Jesus says: ¹⁹*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path.*

The people Jesus speaks about here are those who don't give the Gospel a second thought. Sure, they might cordially listen as you confess Christ and even nod their heads in agreement. They may pretend to understand, but they really don't because they view the Gospel as foolish from the outset. Their closed minds prevent the Gospel from ever taking root. The devil snatches it away.

But before you think that this part of the parable only describes non-Christians, consider another group that fits this category: those who come to church, not because they believe, but for tradition's sake. They go through the motions of worship every Sunday – giving their offering and volunteering for service – but never really applying God's Word to themselves. Relying on their own "goodness," they allow devilish thoughts of pride and self-righteousness to prevent the Gospel from taking root in their hearts. Sunday after Sunday, the Spirit sows His Word, and Sunday after Sunday, the devil steals it away.

Again, the problem is not with the Gospel but with an ear that refuses to hear and a heart hardened with pride – things that all of us inherited from Adam. Every time we pray and sing without thinking or let our minds wander during the service, the devil tries to snatch the Gospel away from us before it takes root. Every time we make excuses for not reading the Bible at home or gathering with fellow believers around God's Word, the devil is present, snatching the seed away from us.

May this realization lead us to pray: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive my wandering mind. Help me stay focused on Your Gospel. Help me grow in faith and keep the devil from snatching Your Word from my ear."

Part Two: Do you let trouble scorch it from your heart?

Jesus continues: ²⁰*The seed that was sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he is not deeply rooted and does not endure. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.*

Jesus describes the person who receives the Gospel in faith but has false expectations of what following Jesus entails. He thinks that his faith will exempt him from all misfortune and grant him earthly prosperity, health, happiness, and success. Therefore, when the troubles arise that are an inescapable part of Christian living, he questions why he should have to suffer. Feeling betrayed by God, he lets the devil lead him away from his faith.ⁱⁱⁱ

But before you think this part of the parable doesn't apply to you, consider what your first instinct is when unjust suffering befalls you. Isn't it to complain, to question why God would allow all this evil in your life? And thus the devil attempts to use the heat of trials and tribulations to scorch your faith out of your heart. When times are tough, let us ask God to help us believe what His Word says about troubles and to trust His promises about what He's accomplishing through them.^{iv}

And what does God say about earthly hardships? He says that His followers should expect them!^v The reason we face trouble on this earth is not because God hates us, but because He loves us. Think of it this way: the sun that scorched the seed in the rocky soil is the same sun that the seed in the good soil needs to grow as it should. Plants need lots of sun to bear fruit.^{vi} And the same is true for us: trouble and persecution for the Gospel force us to rely on the promises God makes in the Gospel. Such reliance on God strengthens our faith to produce the sweet spiritual fruit of patience, humility and love.^{vii}

Yes, trials and troubles are necessary for a Christian's faith to grow. But the Christian in whom the Gospel is not firmly rooted will easily give up his faith during difficult times.

May this sobering truth lead us to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive me for the times I complained about my troubles instead of turning to You in faith. Thank You for enduring the scorching heat of Your trials in my place, perfectly trusting in Your Father's promises. Break up the rocky ground of my heart and plant Your Word deep within so that I hold fast to Your promised grace for me in Christ when trouble comes."

Part Three: Do you let the world choke it from your soul?

Jesus continues: ²²*The seed that was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it produces no fruit.*

Even though the person described here believes in Jesus, he nevertheless lets worldly worries separate him from God -- living contrary to Jesus' promise: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"^{viii}

Because we live in a materialistic society, the deceitfulness of wealth tempts us all.^{ix} The world tells us we deserve a certain "quality of life." We confuse luxuries with necessities and let our work or leisure infringe on our time with God in His Word. The worries of this world entangle our hearts to such a degree that we would rather work than worship, read blogs rather than the Bible, and screen scroll with strangers rather than converse with our Saviour in prayer. We excuse our neglect of God's Word by saying: "We're just too busy right now," or "We're too exhausted to concentrate," as our faith slowly chokes away.

Beware, dear Christian, and do not imagine yourself standing firm against the choking power of worldly worries and pursuits. None of us can unless Christ frees us from their grasp. Realize this about yourself, and pray: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive me for allowing my worries to separate me from Your promises. Forgive me for pursuing the lusts of my eyes, instead of You, the love of my heart. Use Your promises to strengthen my trust and love in You."

Part Four: Or does it take root in you and produce abundant fruit?

Our text concludes with Jesus saying: ²³*But the seed that was sown on the good ground is the one who continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown.*

The good soil is the man whose heart God has prepared to receive the Gospel. In fact, it is the very Gospel seed itself that performs this miracle. God's Law gets things ready by crushing the rocks of sin, self-righteousness, and idolatry from the heart. Then the seed of the Gospel, which is God's power for salvation,^x tells us the good news that *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*^{xi}

Jesus loves us so much that He willingly took our punishment upon Himself and died for our sins. He forgave us and wants us to receive this salvation as our very own through repentance and faith. The Gospel message of God's saving love for us in Christ is the seed that penetrates our spiritually lifeless hearts and gives birth to our trust and love of Him.^{xii}

Moreover, as our faith in Christ grows, it produces sweet spiritual fruit: the new attitudes of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*^{xiii} It compels us to share the Gospel with those around us.^{xiv} It leads us to produce good, God-pleasing works out of thanks to the LORD for the eternal life He has freely given us in Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, never doubt the power of the Gospel, for it alone has the power to forgive our sins. It alone has the power to awaken spiritual life in us and in others. Through the Gospel alone, God grants us eternal life through faith in His Son.

By God's grace, you are the soil in which God's Gospel seed has taken root and is growing. Praise Him for this and continue to receive the Gospel in faith with thanksgiving. Do not let the devil snatch it from your ear. Do not let trouble scorch it from your heart. Do not let worry or wealth choke it from your soul. Pray that the LORD prevents these things from happening to you. And He will, for the same Word that gave you faith will keep you rooted in Christ and bearing fruit.

Therefore, listen to your Saviour with all eagerness, never ceasing to rejoice over the Gospel of God's love for you in Christ; for it alone *is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*^{xv} Amen.

ⁱ Albrecht, G. J., & Albrecht, M. J. (1996). *Matthew*. The People's Bible (194). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Hebrews 4:12 & Isaiah 55:10-11

ⁱⁱⁱ Albrecht, G. J., & Albrecht, M. J. (1996). *Matthew*. The People's Bible (195). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

^{iv} Cf. Romans 8:18

^v Cf. John 16:33

^{vi} Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (520). Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House.

^{vii} Cf. Colossians 1:10-12

^{viii} Matthew 6:33 EHV

^{ix} Albrecht, G. J., & Albrecht, M. J. (1996). *Matthew*. The People's Bible (196). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

^x Cf. Romans 1:16

^{xi} John 3:16 EHV

^{xii} Balge, R. D., & Ehlke, R. C. (1989). *Sermon Studies on the Gospels: (ILCW Series A)* (256). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House.

^{xiii} Galatians 5:22-23 EHV

^{xiv} Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14

^{xv} Romans 1:16 EHV