

The Tragedy of Fruitless Christianity, Part 1

Luke 8:13-14

We're studying the parable of the sower also known probably more accurately as the parable of the soils in Luke chapter 8. Luke 8:4 says, "When a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 'A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.' As he said these things, he called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

Well, last time we talked about the hard packed soil, which is a picture of a human heart that has been hardened by the pride of false religion, false religion. Jesus gave the picture

back in verse 5, he interpreted the picture for us in verse 12. Today, we want to move on. And we want to look at two more soils, two more kinds of hearts. These are two kinds of hearts that seem to be responsive. They appear to respond well to the word of God. But ultimately, in the end, they turn away from the gospel, and they fall away from Jesus Christ. And folks, you need to pay close attention to this.

Here's the reason you need to listen carefully to what Jesus teaches here. There are many who attend Christian churches across our country, throughout our state, in this region, and in this city, many who call themselves Christians, but their hearts are pictured by the first three soils.

We pray this isn't the case in our own church, but we're quite certain it is, among some. As it was in Jesus' day, so it is in our own day. This is a perennial problem with the human heart, the human condition, the unbelieving heart. It's everywhere in human history. So we shouldn't be so proud as to think it wouldn't happen here in our midst.

But sadly, what Jesus speaks of here is probably worse in our own time and in our own country, because we have actually crafted an American form of Christianity that accommodates bad soils, that affirms bad hearts, and gives them false assurances that they're just fine, when they're really not. And now through global missions, we've exported this brand of sub-Christian, American Christianity all over the world. American Christianity is a false religion of fruitless converts.

I know that's bold, but I'm gonna say it again. American Christianity is a false religion of fruitless converts. There have been theologians from prominent colleges and seminaries who have engaged in hermeneutical gymnastics, and clever exegesis in interpretation to create a category for this, this mongrel. It's this unholy crossbreed of a Christian with an unregenerate heathen blended together in one, they call them carnal Christians, or backslidden Baptists, they say with a wink, but they're referring to a fruitless Christian.

As I said, they used to be called carnal Christians. They used to be called backslidden Christians. These days, people have dropped the adjectives. Now they just call them Christians.

They're hard hearted hearts of verse 12, they're fruitless hearts of verses 13 and 14. But we Americans have created false forms of Christianity to accommodate them and call them Christians and count them as church members.

And as all the surveys revealed Barna Research Group, Pew Research, they can call themselves Christians now. They can check that box, even if they rarely attend church, rarely read the Bible. "Judge not," right? That is why we need to pay careful attention to Jesus' teaching in these verses. Our background, our enculturation is in this distinctively American false religion. It may have not set us up well, it may have not helped us to be discerning.

But here we get the privilege of listening to Jesus as he gives us discernment, as he helps us to grow in understanding and we're going to learn here from Jesus, how to discern the difference between false professors of Christianity and true possessors of Christ. That is vital, that is vital folks if we are to practice true Christian love.

Divine love sent from heaven above, the failure to produce true Christian fruit in our lives. The failure to grow into maturity by the Holy Spirit in a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. Listen, that is an eternally damning condition. If we truly love others, we do not want to give them false assurances that they are Christians, when there is no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. So if we're going to love them, we will love them by praying for them, by admonishing them, and by warning them about the dangers of fruitless religion.

Ah, but before we look at the lives of others, we're going to examine ourselves first. We need to have discernment about others, yes, but lest we be guilty of walking around with that protrusion, called a, a log in our eyes or a beam sticking out of our eye sockets, blinded to our own condition.

Look, we need to exercise discernment about ourselves, first. What a tragedy to grow up and live and live your entire life in a church like this one or other faithful churches around the country, and stand before God and realize you have borne no fruit, nothing, not one little shriveled up grape. You stand

before him, having attended church all your life, and the lever is pulled and down you go.

Let's take a look at the first point, number one, the pictures of fruitless Christianity. To remind you of those pictures we'll just go back to what we read there in verses 5 and 6. "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it." We covered that first soil last time. Now this in verse 6, "Some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture."

The first picture of fruitless Christianity is seed that falls into rocky soil, rocky soil. Now, this rocky soil doesn't refer to a bunch of rocks in the dirt. This is not a, a parable about bad farming practices or lazy farmers who never pull the rocks out of their field. Jesus is speaking here of a very well known reality of farming in first century Palestine.

There were many places throughout their land, maybe a foot or two beneath the surface of the topsoil, which could be very

rich, appear to be very good soil. There was underneath there, a limestone rock bed and this layer of limestone could remain hidden from even the most diligent of farmers as they plowed that field for the first time. Seed that was sown into this, what is, what by, you know, by observation they didn't know, but through experience they would learn was shallow soil.

That seed that was sown into shallow soil, couldn't sustain growth. It couldn't bring plants up to maturity and fruitfulness. The problem is that the farmer couldn't tell right away that he had sown his seed into shallow soil because at first everything looked great. The seed would hit the soil, it would go in like any other seed, it would germinate underneath the soil, it starts sending the roots downward for nutrients and water, and stalks upward for light, energy.

Well, because the roots couldn't grow deep enough, they would hit that limestone layer beneath, hidden beneath the soil. And all that young plant's energies would be directed upward. So this fledgling plant would break through the surface, actually too quickly. It almost looked too eager. Its growth would be mostly above ground, it would look very good, very healthy at

first. But then, when the sun passed over that shallow rooted plant, the heat from the sun would cook that plant because without a sufficient root system, without sufficient water and nutrients that plant would wither and die almost as soon as it sprang up and started developing foliage.

The analogy here to the shallow heart is pretty obvious. But let's wait to consider that 'til we look at the next verse, verse 7, which pictures the thorny soil, which is the second picture of fruitless Christianity. Says in verse 7, "Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." You got good seed, but when it falls into weed infested soil, doesn't matter how hardy or robust of a seed it is, doesn't matter whether it's a genetically modified, bionic super seed when it falls into weedy soil that has, had this suffocating effect on even the best hardiest of seeds.

In a sin cursed world, everything that we want to grow, that which is useful to us like our food, those plants struggle to survive. But everything we don't want to grow, like thorns, and weeds, and poisonous, noxious plants. My backyard is full of them, all right, those plants grow without any effort at all.



And they grew up more than everything else I want to grow, like my grass. Weeds are right at home in a sin cursed soil.

And they act and grow with aggressive hostility toward our food. So when these two kinds of plants are together, plants for food and weeds for the curse, when our food is trying to grow in a soil that's been seeded with weeds, the more aggressive weeds, they take over that space, they grow faster, they grow stronger, they grow higher than our crops, the weeds steal the precious sunlight and energy. They devour the soil's nutrients, they drink up the moisture in the soil.

You might say the weeds are guilty of plant murder. When they kill, they kill their victims slowly. The weeds choke out the good plants, suffocate them over time, they starve the good plants of food, they dehydrate them of water, they rob them from the sun, sun's energy. It's a slow, cruel death over time, but those good plants eventually bear no fruit. Again, the analogy to the heart condition is pretty apparent.

So let's get right into our second point, which is Jesus' interpretation. In verses 13 and 14, you see, second point your outline, he points to the roots of fruitless Christianity, the roots of fruitless Christianity. Jesus' interpretation of the first picture of fruitless Christianity is there in verse 13.

"The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away." The first reason for fruitless Christianity that Jesus points out here, is superficial enthusiasm, superficial enthusiasm. And at the root of this kind of heart, which is pictured by the rocky soil is the failure to fear, and to trust, and to love God fully and truly. Superficial enthusiasm at the root of the heart, pictured in the rocky soil is the failure to fear God, to trust God, to love God fully and truly. These people are people who have not, who have not examined their hearts, they don't see themselves clearly.

They think they've got a good picture and a good understanding. They're pretty self-assured, but they don't see themselves clearly. And they refuse to look at themselves

closely. They refuse to look at their own hearts. Interesting thing about these supposed disciples, is that they look like the best converts. They're excited, they're joyful, they're eager to learn, and it's, get this, it is not an act. The verb that Jesus uses here indicates that they really feel this way.

They really do receive the word whenever they hear it. But that is part of the problem. Their emotions are out in front. And their minds and their wills are lagging far behind because they haven't thought deeply enough. "They have not counted the cost in order that they might wholly and completely devote themselves to God." So Jesus says here, "When they hear the word, they receive it with joy." Probably a better way to translate that is, Whenever they hear the word, they receive it with joy. That's what the text actually says. The picture is of someone who will receive the word with joy. And they'll do so repeatedly. Whenever they hear it.

They're excited listeners. This is kind of the person who hears and then kind of starts to fall away. But they come back and they keep hearing and they, then they fall, and they come back, and this is a multiple conversion person. You know that

person? The one who's repeatedly making professions of faith recommitting their lives, they're getting baptized and re-baptized and they come again and get baptized, re-baptized again. Each time they are sincere in doing so. In fact, they seem so sincere, so zealous, so eager, they appear to be the model convert. As I said, these are people who are reacting superficially, with a mere emotional response.

Proverbs 17:3, "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests the hearts." Little pressure, little heat, it's all it takes to test the validity of someone's profession of faith. Jesus is specific at spelling out the kinds of testing that come to those who profess faith.

Luke records here the word "testing" it's a more general summary term that Jesus used for testing, *peirasmos*, but Matthew and Mark record more specific words that Jesus used two, "Tribulation and persecution." Tribulation literally means pressure. It's referring to a pressing down or pressing together, squeezed in a vise.

Could refer to trouble in general, but particularly of affliction, oppression. The word persecution in Matthew and Mark refers to being pursued, hunted, even injured. Add both of those terms together tribulation, persecution come to those who profess Christ according to Matthew and Mark because of the word. Those, the tribulation isn't just a general one that we all feel or persecution that maybe we all feel if some other country were to invade and persecute us. That's not the sense.

This is tribulation, persecution that come because of the word or in Sermon on the Mount terms. Jesus spoke of tribulation, persecution that can come on account of the Son of Man. When that happens to the superficial enthusiast, that person withers and wilts and dies like a shallow rooted plant in the sun's heat.

They may have received the word with joy whenever they heard it. They may have believed for a time, they may have come forward, signed cards, met with counselors, they may have been in the church for a time, but when the heat comes, they're goners. Whereas Jesus said, here in the text, "They fall away."

They fall away. It's the verb we get from, from this verb, we get the word apostasy.

In fact, one of the meanings in the range of this verb, *aphistemi* is religious in nature, it's to become apostate, to go apostate. So when testing comes, those with rocky soil hearts, the superficial enthusiast, while their emotions take them in decidedly away from Christ direction. They distance themselves, they withdraw, they go away, and they eventually stay away entirely.

These are the apostates, they're not true believers. But they're fruitless Christians who only professed faith, were superficially connected to the vine, but they never actually possessed faith or vitality from the vine. They appear, only appear to be Christians, and only for a time as, 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they are not all of us."

The apostle John wants us to learn discernment too. This is strong teaching from Jesus, isn't it? And I'm guessing that there are those in our midst who are more emotional among us and they're wondering, What about me? What if my emotions lead me astray? Will I fall away too? Will testing come to me that's eventually going to drive me away?

Listen, if you're more emotional person by nature, and if you're here wondering whether or not your emotional response to the gospel and the truths of scripture and your love for Jesus is real. How do you know if this is all really real? You know, by whether or not your faith endures testing. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life," Get this, "Which God has promised to those who love him." That's the root of it all. Those who endure testing are those who know and love God.

It's not mere emotion; it's rooted, anchored emotion. It's emotion that springs up from deep conviction about knowing God. The love is real, and they will no doubt about it, Romans 8, read that last section in Romans 8. "Neither life nor death, nor

angels, nor powers, nor any other thing," Right? "Will separate us from the love of God in Christ." They will stand against tribulation and persecution because they know and love and reverence the Lord God. They'd rather die than live in any denial of Christ.

As J.C. Ryle put it, quote, "Feelings, no doubt, fill a most important role in our personal Christianity. Without them there can be no saving religion, hope and joy and peace and love and fear are things which must be felt if they really exist. But it must never be forgotten that there are religious affections which are spurious and false and spring from nothing better than animal excitement.

"It is quite possible to feel great pleasure or deep alarm under the preaching of the gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. The tears of some hearers of sermons, and the extravagant delight of others are no certain sign of conversion. We may be warm admirers of favorite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than rocky ground hearers. We should be content with nothing less than a deep,



humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Spirit and the uniting of our hearts with Christ." End quote.

I hope you heard that "Deep, humbling, self-mortifying, self-killing work of the Holy Spirit, and uniting of our hearts with Christ." That's true conversion. That's the kind of conversion that will stand the test, any tribulation, any persecution on account of the word, on account of the Son of Man, that will stand to the end.